INSPIRED THE HIT ANIME!

PEACE MAKER 鐵 4

KUROGANE

NANAE • CHRONO

PEACE MAKER 鐵

KUROGANE

Peace Maker Kurogane 4

Created by NANAE CHRONO

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PEACE MAKER鐵
KUROGANE

Volume 4
by Nanae Chrono

ICHIMURA TETSUNOSUKE

HIJIKATA'S PAGE

BRASH TETSU HAS JOINED THE SHINSENGUMI TO LEARN TO BECOME STRONG. HE WANTS TO GET REVENGE ON HIS PARENTS' MURDERERS, CHOUSHUU REBELS. ALTHOUGH HE JOINED THE SHINSENGUMI WITH ASPIRATIONS OF BECOMING A SWORDSMAN, HE'S BEEN ASSIGNED THE THANKLESS DUTY OF HIJIKATA'S PAGE.

HIJIKATA TOSHIZOU

VICE COMMANDER

BECAUSE OF HIS COLD DEMEANOR AND BRUTALITY, HE IS KNOWN AS THE "DEMON VICE COMMANDER."

YAMANAMI KEISUKE

VICE COMMANDER

THIS BUDDHA-LIKE VICE COMMANDER COULDN'T BE LESS LIKE HIJIKATA. HE'S OFTEN SEEN CARRYING HIS ABACUS.

OKITA SOUJI

CAPTAIN OF THE FIRST SQUAD

THE BEST SWORDSMAN IN THE SHINSENGUMI. HE'S GENERALLY CALM AND FRIENDLY, BUT WIELDING A BLADE CAN TRANSFORM HIM INTO A HEARTLESS KILLER.

KITAMURA SUZU

A BOY WITH SILVER HAIR. HE HAS NO FAMILY AND LIVED WITH HIS MASTER, YOSHIDA TOSHIMARO, UNTIL YOSHIDA WAS SLAIN DURING THE IKEDAYA INCIDENT. NOW SUZU IS...?

KONDOU ISAMI

DIRECTOR

A FOUNDING MEMBER OF THE SHINSENGUMI AND ALSO A MASTER AT THE SHIEIKAN DOJO IN EDO, THE MAIN DOJO OF THE TENNEN RISHIN STYLE.

MAIN CHARACTERS

NAGAKURA SHINPACHI

CAPTAIN OF THE SECOND SQUAD

SMALL BUT STRONG. A SWORDSMAN LIKE OKITA. HE FIGHTS IN THE SHINTO-MUNEN SCHOOL STYLE.

TOUDOU HEISUKE

CAPTAIN OF THE EIGHTH SQUAD

ONE OF THE THREE STOOGES OF THE SHINSENGUMI. HE LIKES CUTE THINGS, INCLUDING TETSU.

HARADA SANOSUKE

CAPTAIN OF THE TENTH SQUAD

A GIANT AMONG MEN, HE'S A MASTER OF THE SPEAR IN THE HOZOIN SCHOOL STYLE. HE'S GOOD FRIENDS WITH SHINPACHI.

ICHIMURA TATSUNOSUKE

TETSU'S OLDER BOTHER AND GUARDIAN. HE'S ALWAYS WORRYING ABOUT TETSU. TATSU WANTS NOTHING TO DO WITH SWORDFIGHTING, AND IS A BOOKKEEPER FOR THE SHINSENGUMI.

YAMAZAKI SUSUMU

SHINSENGUMI NINJA

A SPY FOR THE SHINSENGUMI, HE REPORTS TO HIJIKATA. TACITURN AND COLD, HE HOLDS MANY SECRETS.

SAYA

TETSU SAVED HER FROM SOME RUFFIANS, AND NOW THE TWO ARE FRIENDS. SAYA CANNOT SPEAK, BUT COMMUNICATES THROUGH HAND GESTURES AND WRITING.

SHINSENGUMI MEMBERS

PERSONS OUTSIDE THE SHINSENGUMI

THE STORY OF PEACE MAKER

IN THE FIRST YEAR OF GENJI, 1864, JAPAN WAS IN GREAT TURMOIL. MILITANT AND XENOPHOBIC FORCES, WHICH HAD LONG OPPOSED THE TOKUGAWA SHOGUNATE, ADVOCATED EXPELLING WESTERN INFLUENCE AND RESTORING THE EMPEROR IN KYOTO TO POWER. TO PROTECT THE SHOGUNATE'S INTEREST IN KYOTO, A LEGENDARY PEACEKEEPING FORCE WAS FORMED FROM TWO HUNDRED-SOME RONIN. THEY WERE THE SHINSENGUMI. THIS IS THE STORY OF ICHIMURA TETSUNOSUKE, WHO SOUGHT TO JOIN THEM.

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源長潜贈選海

第拾六話 Chapter 16 Origin

みなもと

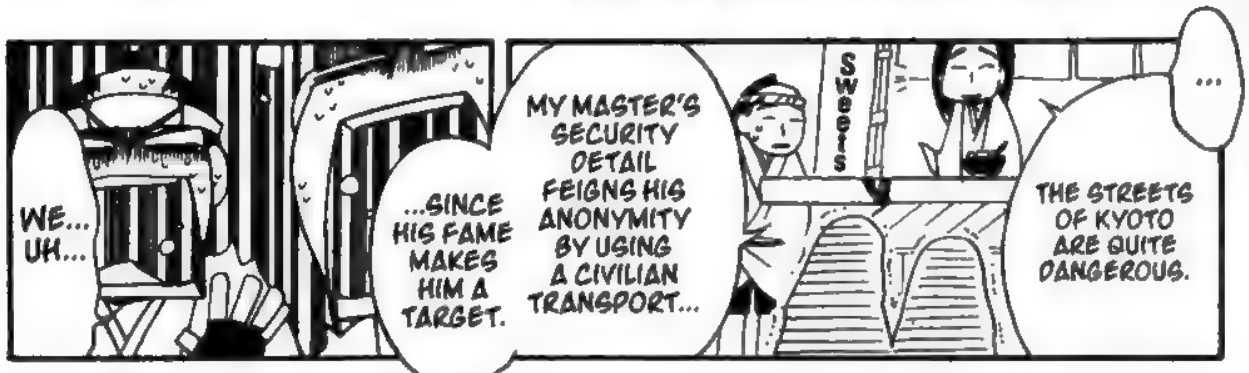
YOU GOT A LOTTA NERVE, WALKIN' AROUND IN PLAIN DAYLIGHT LIKE THAT!
YOU AND YOUR NERVE AIN'T GETTIN' AWAY THIS TIME!!
CLOP
CLOP
CLOP
CLOP
CLOP
OHHHNOOOO!!
ZWOOOOM
SAKAMOTO RYOUMA!!
HEY, DIDN'T YOU GUYS CHASE ME DOWN THIS SAME STREET TWO DAYS AGO?!
Nwaahhh!
KIDS CHASE! MEN STAND ON THEIR FEET AND FIGHT!
SAYS YOU! YOU'VE GOT WHEELS ON YOUR FEET!

...CRAP!
?!
PIN
PUT YOUR ARMS OUT FOR CUFFING, SAKAMOTO!!
hah hah hah hah!
DON'T YOU PEOPLE EVER TAKE A HINT?!
PLOP
MY POOR ORYO-CHAN DX #2!!
!!
SHEEIT!!
CAN'T ROLL AWAY NOW, SCUM-BUCKET!
WOOSH
WE'VE GOT YOU TRAPPED FROM BOTH SIDES!!!

This is a work of fiction based on historical figures and events.

?
WUH?
WHO ARE YOU?
...AND SHOW US WHAT'S INSIDE?
WHY DON'T YOU OPEN THAT PALANQUIN...
UHH...
I DON'T THINK THAT'S WISE...
AND WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE WE'RE DOING?! WE'RE ON A MANHUNT!
IS THIS YOURS? I'LL NEED TO SEARCH IT.
...
MY MASTER IS RIDING WITHIN.
HE IS NOT TO BE DISTURBED.
HE HAS A MEETING AT THIS PLACE OF BUSINESS.
WHAT KIND OF BUSINESS?
Sweets
HE DESIRES BEAN JAM AND FRUIT.

AND IS IT AGAINST THE LAW FOR KATSU KAISHUU...
...CHIEF OFFICER OF THE SHOGUNATE, TO INDULGE IN A TREAT?
...


WE... UH...
...SINCE HIS FAME MAKES HIM A TARGET.
MY MASTER'S SECURITY DETAIL FEIGNS HIS ANONYMITY BY USING A CIVILIAN TRANSPORT...
SWEEP
THE STREETS OF KYOTO ARE QUITE DANGEROUS.
...

IF THE TARGET OF YOUR EXPERT MANHUNT IS THAT OOO VAGRANT, HE CLIMBED UP TO THE ROOF AND RAN WEST.
WE'RE TERRIBLY SORRY FOR ANY INCON-VENIENCE!! MOST HUMBLE APOLOGIES, MY LORD!!!

HEY, USUALLY I CAN SHAKE THE AUTHORITIES WITHOUT HELP.
HAHAH
AND STILL DRESSED LIKE A DAMNED FOOL?
STILL WANDERING AROUND DAY AND NIGHT WITHOUT A CARE IN THE WORLD...
Tut tut!
NON-NON, KATSU-SENSEI!
...WITHOUT WARNING, AND EXPECT TO RECEIVE AN AUDIENCE WITH SAIGOU?
AND NOW YOU SHOW UP EMPTY-HANDED...
Sigh...
NOW YOU'RE JUST PREACHING ICHIMURA'S VERSE.
YOU MEET 'EM FACE-TO-FACE... AND HIT 'EM RIGHT IN THE SOUL!
whap
WHEN YOU WANT TO BEFRIEND THE HIGH AND MIGHTY, FIRST YOU ENGAGE THE SOUL!

SPEAKING OF WHICH, KATSU-SENSEI...
...IT MIGHT INTEREST YOU TO KNOW...
...THAT KYOTO ALSO HARBORS THE SON OF THE PEACE-MAKER.
...!
SO, HE'S ALIVE AND WELL...
...
AND YOU THINK ...
...THE BOY IS WITH HIM...?
OH, YES.
AND WHERE ARE THEY? AND WHAT ARE THEY UP TO?
MUST BE HAVING A HARD TIME THESE DAYS, DON'T YOU THINK?
I BET YOU'RE DYING TO KNOW!

TURNS OUT THEY'RE MEMBERS OF THE SHINSEN-GUMI.
BOTH OF 'EM!
WHAT?!
IT TOOK SOME INVESTI-GATION, BUT APPAR-ENTLY...
...THEY JOINED UP TO AVENGE THEIR PARENTS' DEATHS.
...
AND THEY THINK SOMEONE FROM THE CHOUSHUU DOMAIN ...IS RESPON-SIBLE FOR THAT.
THE BALANCE WILL HOLD FOR NOW.
BUT WHEN THE COMING "COMPROMISE" BECOMES OFFICIAL, WE'LL HAVE A HELL OF A WAR ON OUR HANDS.
AND IF THEY STAY WITH THE SHINSENGUMI, THEY AIN'T GONNA SURVIVE.
SAY, KATSU-SENSEI. YOU'RE WITH THE SHOGUNATE...
...CAN'T YOU JUST FORCE THEM TWO BOYS OUT OF THE GROUP?
DON'T ASK THE IMPOS-SIBLE.

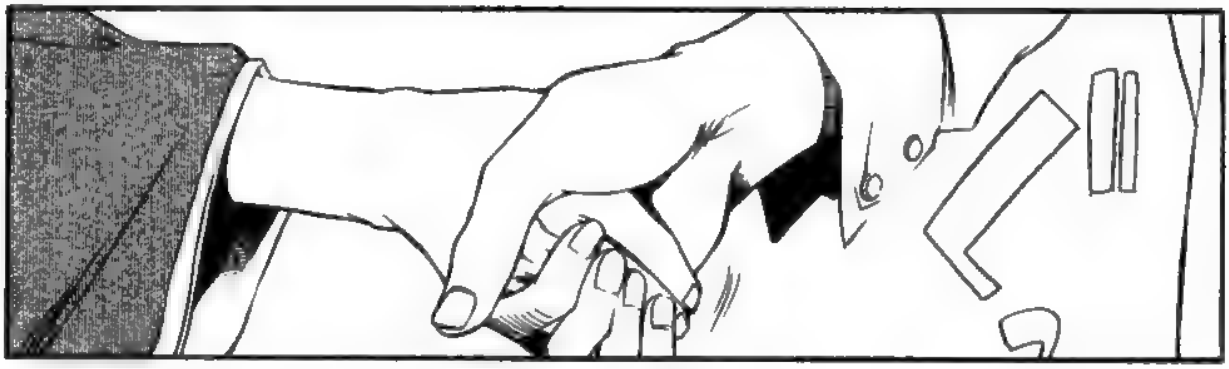
CLANK...
...
?
PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT WON'T DO THOSE BOYS ANY GOOD.
SINCE THEIR FATHER...
...NEVER TOLD THEM A SINGLE WORD OF THE TRUTH.
...
IT'S NOT FOR STRANGERS LIKE US TO TELL THEM HOW IT SHOULD BE.
...
?
RYOUMA-SAN?
IS ANY-THING THE--

Hee hee.
AOTANI, LAY OUT A BED IN BACK AND PUT HIM ON IT.
YES, SIR.
DAMMIT... THIS IS GREAT.
THOSE KIDS DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY'RE DOING.
Zzz...
Zzzzz...
...
FIVE YEARS AGO...

1860: OUR FOREIGN INSPECTION GROUP LEFT FOR SAN FRANCISCO ON THE STEAM SHIP KANRINMARU...
KATSU-SAN!
...NOMINALLY AS A DELEGATION TO AMERICA FOLLOWING THE TREATY OF AMITY AND COMMERCE BETWEEN OUR NATIONS.
WE'RE ABOUT TO ENTER THE PORT.
HOW IS YOUR SEASICK-NESS FARING?
Wobble...
I SHALL BE GLAD TO BE RID OF IT, JOHN-SAN.
AHHH!
I CAN SEE THE PORT!
HA HA HA! YOU MAY CALL ME "MANJIRO," IF YOU PLEASE.
AFTER ALL, I AM JAPANESE NOW!
?!
WHACK
HOW DARE YOU!!

FIRST OF ALL, SPEAK ENGLISH, JAP!
SECOND, DON'T YELL AT A MAN WHO'S ONLY OFFERING TO HELP!
FWAP
FIRST YOU STEAL MY BELONGINGS, THEN YOU PRETEND IGNORANCE...
...AND THEN YOU DARE SNORT AT MY HAIRSTYLE? LEARN SOME MANNERS, YANK!!
WAIT A MOMENT, KATSU-SAN!
HEY!! WHAT'S GOING ON OVER THERE?!
WHAT?! WHAT'S SO FUNNY?!
OR IS THERE NO WORD FOR KINDNESS IN JAPANESE? BUNCHA YELLOW MONKEYS!
HAHAHA
SPECIALIST?
WE HAVE A SPECIALIST HERE TO TAKE CARE OF THEM.
THESE SQUABBLES ARE COMMON.

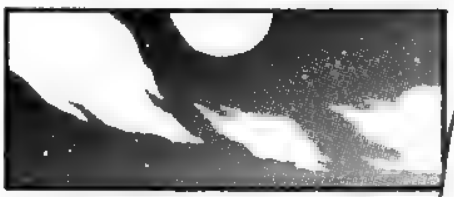
EXCUSE ME, SIR!
YOU TOO, ENDO-SAN. JUST CALM DOWN.
CAN YOU FIND IT INSIDE YOUR HEART TO FORGIVE HIM?
HE'S JUST NERVOUS AND ON EDGE, BECAUSE HE CAN'T UNDERSTAND THE PEOPLE HERE.
I BELIEVE HE WAS TRYING TO ASSIST YOU IN CARRYING YOUR ARTICLES.
HE'S ONLY WELCOMING US INTO THE COUNTRY.
SO, NOW THAT WE'RE ON THE SAME PAGE!
HANDS OUT, GENTLEMEN!



...BUT RETURNED TO NAGASAKI ABOUT ELEVEN YEARS AGO.
HE ONCE SPENT THREE YEARS HERE...
HIS PERSONAL SITUATION IS SIMILAR TO MINE.
HAHA

BY NOT DIRECTLY TRANSLATING EITHER SIDE'S WORDS, HE SOFTENS THEIR MESSAGES TO REACH A COMPROMISE.
...BUT HE HAS A TALENT FOR DIFFUSING FIGHTS AS THEY ARISE.
HIS ENGLISH IS HARDLY PERFECT...

ALLOW ME TO INTRODUCE YOU...



...TO ICHIMURA RYUNOSUKE...
...ALSO KNOWN AS "ICHIMURA THE PEACEMAKER."

ZZZZ…
MNYUM…
ZZZRD…

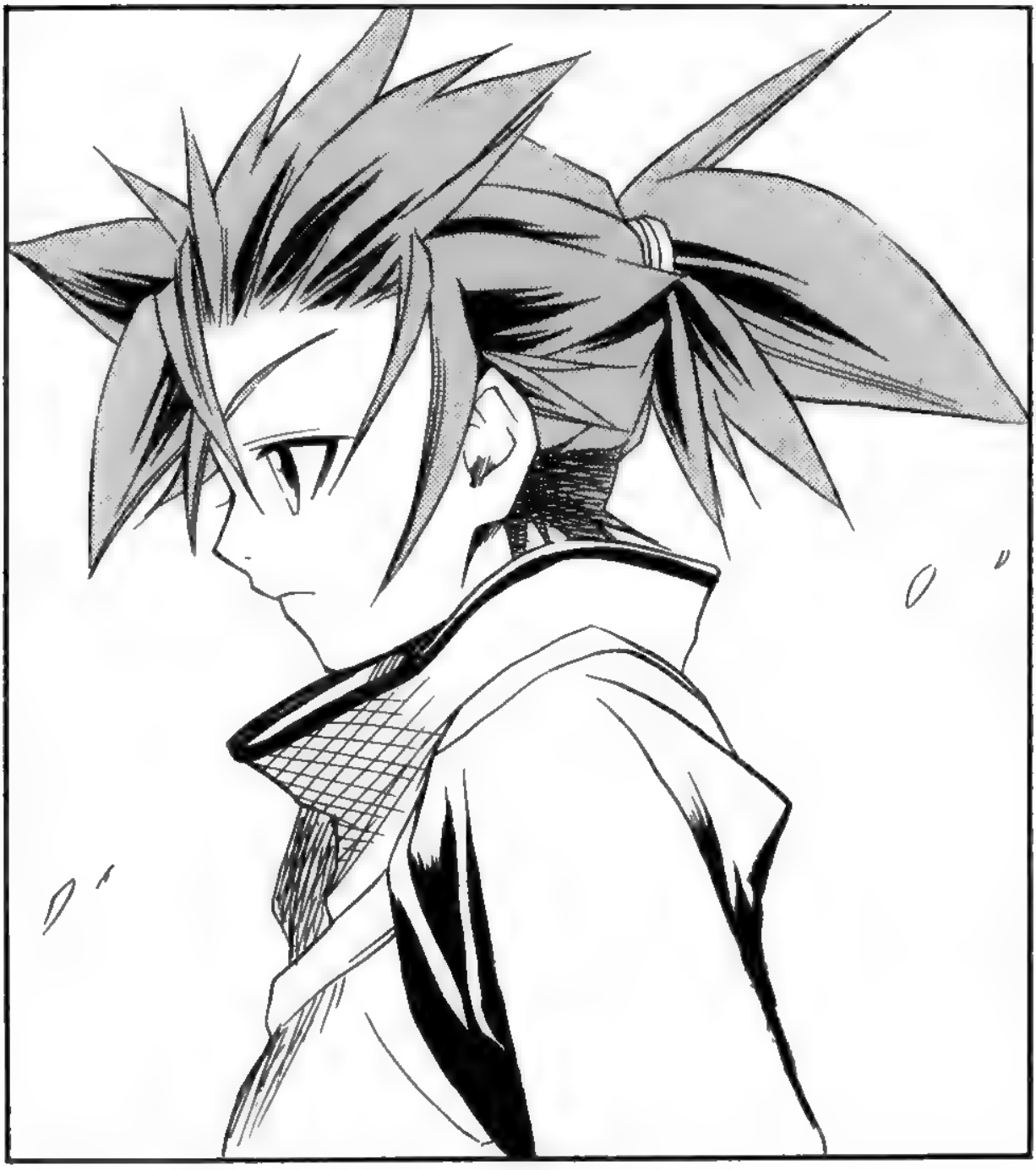
WHO GOES THERE?!
SOMEONE NEEDS TA BE TAUGHT A LIL' LESSON! ☆
AHA. AN ASSASSIN AFTER KATSU-SENSEI...
GSHHK...
...

Winky dink ☆
WHAT'S THIS? YOU'RE NOT GONNA SPLIT ON ME?
'CAUSE IF YOU WANNA PLAY A ROOFTOP SHOOTING GAME...
...IT'S OLD HAT TO...
...ME...
WHOA...

A BLONDE CHICK!

WILL THIS DO AS A DOWN PAYMENT...
...FOR THE ASSASSI-NATION OF KATSU KAISHUU?
...
JUST ONE WILL SUFFICE.
THERE'S NO GUARANTEE OF MY SUCCESS.
AND IF I FAIL, I'LL JUST DISAPPEAR.
AFRAID I MIGHT HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO DROP MY CLIENT'S NAME IF I SHOULD BE CAUGHT.
HA HA.
YES, THAT'S ACCEP-TABLE.
...SINCE, NO MATTER HOW MANY TIMES YOU'VE WARNED ME...
...YOU'VE NEVER ONCE FAILED TO COMPLETE A JOB.

HAVE YOU GIVEN THE MATTER ANY MORE THOUGHT, SARA FUUMA?
WILL YOU BE THE OFFICIAL HIRED NINJA OF MY MASTER?
BAH. NOT FOR ME.
I PREFER THE LIFE OF AN "ASSASSIN"...
...OVER A "NINJA" BOUND BY LOYALTY. SUITS MY STYLE.
KYA HA HA HA!
Woof 'n' woof
eeee
AS LONG AS I'VE GOT THE MONEY TO LIVE AND WORK...
...I DON'T NEED ANYTHING ELSE...



第十七話 Chapter17 Choushuu ちょう

!!
HEY!
SNAG
LET GO OF ME ALREADY!
...!!
...
EXPLAIN YOURSELF OR LOSE YOUR HEAD!
WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO DO?

WHAT'M I DOING?
Rrrgh...
WHY, I'M "SCOUTING" YOU OUT!
WHA--! HEY!
...
...
...BUT YOU GOT SOME GORGEOUS BLUE EYES, LADY!!
WELL, I'LL BE DAMNED...

WHOOPS ...
Stomp
Stomp
Stomp
There we go...
I'm slipping
WHAT'S GOING ON?
IT GOT QUIET ALL OF A SUDDEN.
DO YOU SUPPOSE RYOUMA-SAN FINISHED THE ATTACKER OFF?
GRAKK
KA-WHUMP
AAAGH! YEOW!
...
RYOUMA
...

AH... GREAT...
I GUESS THIS IS WHERE I DIE!
Kchak...
...
Puff
Puff...
Oh my...
WH- WHAT'S THIS? WHO'S THE BLONDE GIRL...?
むぐ!!
WE'VE GOT A NEW MEMBER!
BLONDE CHICK!
HUH?
HUH?

...
...WHA?

WHA--?

?

Awoooooo...

COME WITH ME...
...AND SEE THE WORLD!

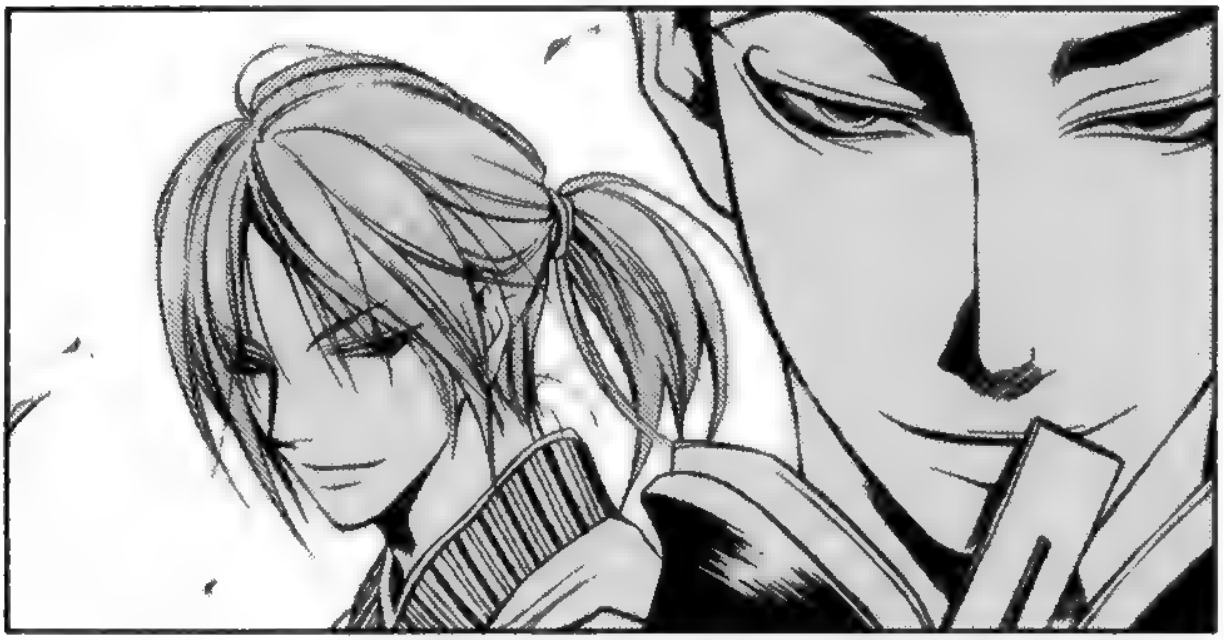
Awoooooo...
HOW THE HELL DID YOU WORK THAT OUT?
Fshhhh
YES, NOTHING QUITE LIKE BRACING SEA AIR!!
AAAH!!
Wa ha ha ha!
THE INLAND SEA IS QUITE BEAUTIFUL. IS IT NOT, SIR?
IN FACT, I'M A BIT RELUCTANT TO LEAVE!
I MUST ADMIT, I DO ENJOY HIROSHIMA!

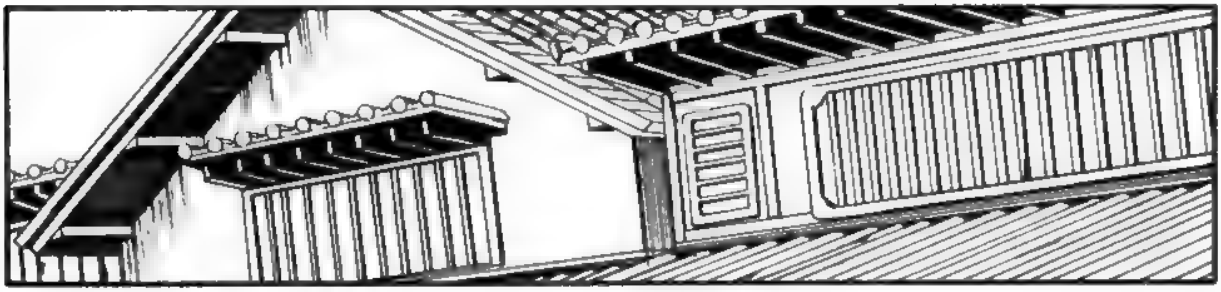
THEY ENTERED HIROSHIMA WITH INTENT TO DISCOVER THE MOTIVES OF THE DOMAIN, AND AFTERWARDS THEY ALSO OBSERVED THE CITY OF IWAKUNI.
IN NOVEMBER OF 1865, THE SHINSENGUMI, LED BY KONDOU AND ITOU, ACCOMPANIED CROSS-EXAMINERS ON A PUNITIVE EXPEDITION INTO CHOSHUU DOMAIN.

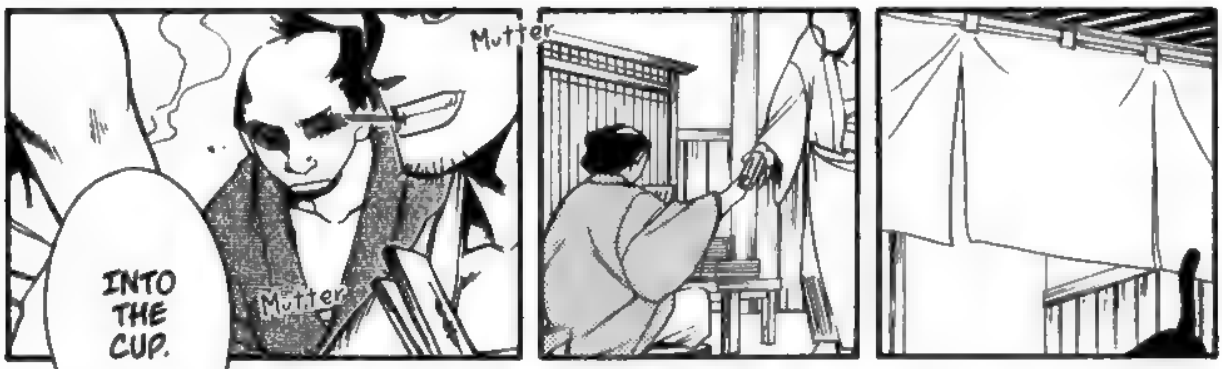
WA HA HA! DON'T BE RIDICULOUS! I'M NOT ACTUALLY GOING TO HOLD YOU BACK!
Once we get back to the station...
...you'll be a graduate of the program!
ONCE YOU'RE HOME, YOU'LL BE AN OFFICIALLY LICENSED DOCTOR WITHIN THE GROUP!
Heh.
HAVE YOU GOTTEN ALL THE MEDICAL SUPPLIES YOU NEEDED?
HOW ARE YOU DOING, YAMAZAKI-KUN?
BY THE TIME THEY PREPARED TO RETURN TO KYOTO, IT WAS THE END OF THE YEAR.
THOUGH I'M SORRY NOT TO HAVE LIVED UP TO EXPECTATIONS.
YES, SIR.

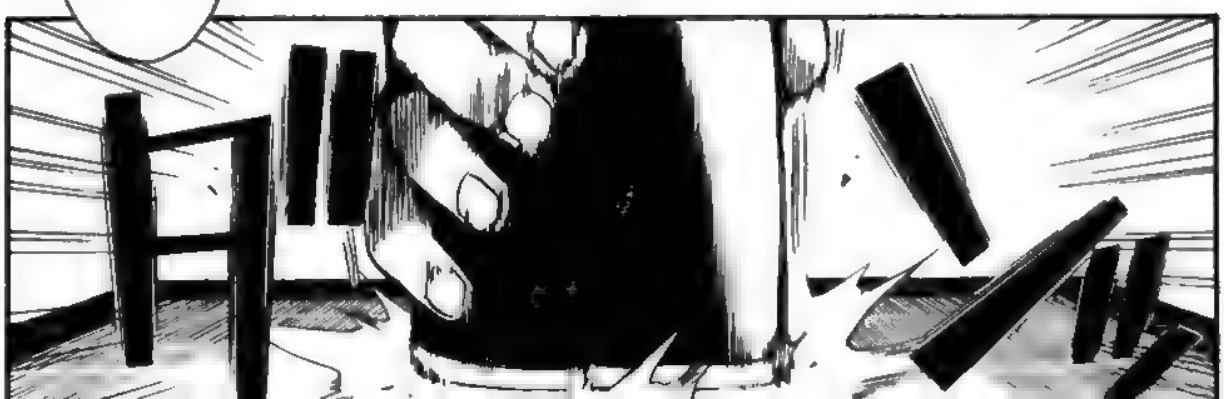
I HAVE A SMALL REQUEST TO MAKE.
CHIEF KONDOU.
HEHEHE!
ALL RIGHT! SOUVENIRS FOR THE OTHERS HAVE BEEN BOUGHT.
I THINK IT'S FINALLY TIME TO HEAD BACK TO KYOTO!

CLOP
CLOP
WELL, I CAN'T SEE ANY REASON TO DENY HIM.
DO YOU REALLY WANT TO LEAVE ITOU BEHIND ALL ALONE?
ARE YOU SURE ABOUT THIS, SIR?
...
I REALIZE IT'S PRESUMP-TUOUS OF ME TO SUGGEST...
...BUT I BELIEVE THAT, IF LEFT ALONE, HE INTENDS TO ONE DAY CRUSH THE SHINSENGUMI.






Mutter
Mutter
INTO THE CUP.



ODD!
EVEN!
ODD!
ODD!
Gulp...

FOUR-AND-ONE MAKES FIVE! ODD!!
CURSES! NOT AGAIN!
YES!
HELL YEAH! I WIN AGAIN!
A MAN FROM CHOUSHUU ALWAYS PUTS HIS LUCK ON EVEN!
THAT'S JUST HOW I PLAY!
SHEESH, PAL. YOU'RE REALLY LIVIN' AN' DYIN' BY EVENS.
OH, SPEAK-ING OF WHICH.
I HEARD TELL OF SATSUMA WHEN...
?!
IS THAT SO? WHO PLAYS ODD, THEN? THE SHOGUN'S MAN?
HMMM ...
PROBABLY THE BASTARDS FROM SATSUMA DOMAIN. THEY'RE THE ONLY ONES LOW ENOUGH.

...
Hmm...
...
OF COURSE
A PIPE...
...IF YOU PLEASE.
FFFFFh...
AHHHH...
...
INTO THE CUP.

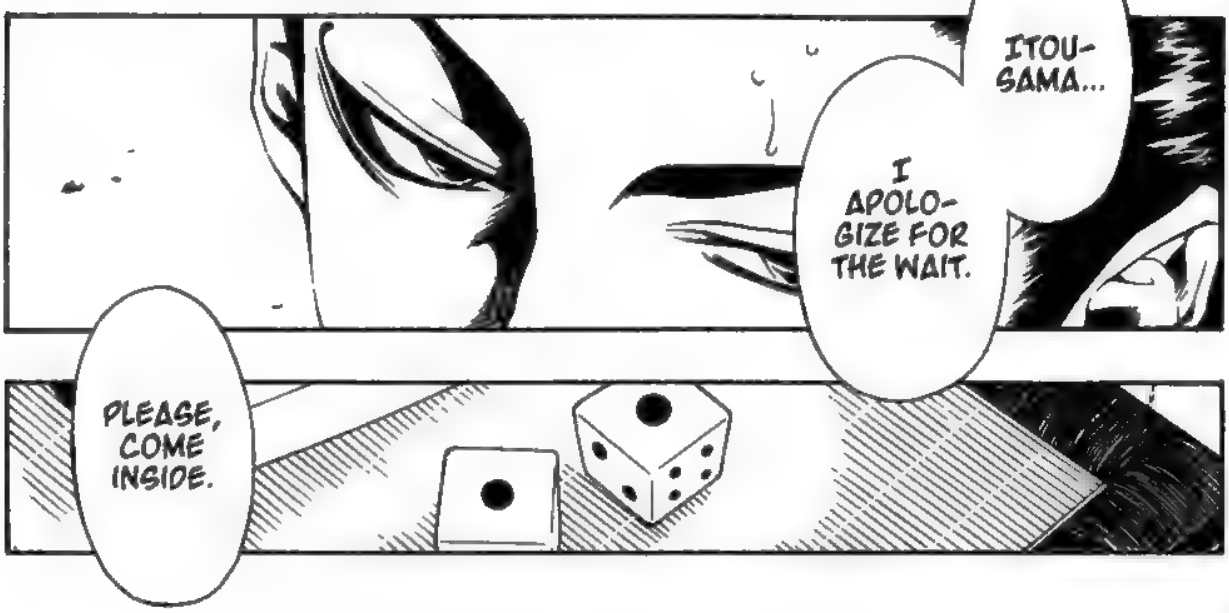
ドッ
ODD!
SOME-THING ABOUT SATSUMA...?
ODD!
SO...WHAT WAS THAT YOU WERE SAYING?
EVEN!
...SEEMS LIKE SATSUMA IS REACTIN' REAL SLOW AN' EASY, DON'T YA THINK?
OH, YOU KNOW. GIVEN THAT THE SHOGUN HAS ORDERED CHOUSHUU BROUGHT UNDER CONTROL...
ODD!
The Li'l lady's gonna be furious.
AWW, HELL! LOST EVERY-THING I HAD...
HEY! I SAID, WHAT WAS THAT ABOUT SATSUMA DOMAIN?
...KATSURA-SAN OF CHOUSHUU AND SAIGOU FROM SATSUMA.
RUMOR SAYS A FORMER SAMURAI OF TOSA IS ATTEMPTING TO BRING TOGETHER...

NOT THAT THOSE TWO WOULD EVER SIT FACE-TO-FACE.
BUT IF IT CAME DOWN TO KATSURA AND SAIGOU!..
NO, THEY WOULD NEVER MEET.
SATSUMA AND CHOUSHUU HAVE BEEN AT ODDS EVER SINCE THE HAMAGURI REBELLION...
I MIGHT BE MOVED TO PLACE A BET...
...ON CHOUSHUU.
"EVEN"!!

...
SNAKE EYES! EVEN!!
Aaahhh!
HAH.
EXCELLENTLY DONE, SENSEI!
YOU NEVER FAIL WHEN IT COMES TO THE HIGH STAKES!
ONE WIN, AND HE RAKES IN THE WHOLE DAMN POT!
ON EVEN?!
WHAT THE HELL'S GOING ON?!
HE JUST POPPED IN THE MOMENT I QUIT!
HE'S CHEATING SOME-HOW--
Easy, champ.

...
HUH? M-MASTER HIKAGAMI!
IT'S NOTHING. NOTHING AT ALL...
WE'RE CERTAINLY NOT CASTING ASPERSIONS ON YOUR FINE ESTABLISHMENT...
EEEK!

Jingle
...
...chilling
...
...


ITOU-SAMA...
I APOLO-GIZE FOR THE WAIT.
PLEASE, COME INSIDE.

SHKK
SHKK
SHKK
SHKK

BUT I DID NOT WISH TO EXPOSE YOUR IDENTITY AMID THOSE CHOUSHUU MEN.
I HUMBLY APOLOGIZE FOR MY RUDENESS.
WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?
WHY HAVE YOU CALLED ME HERE SO SUDDENLY?
I AM HONORED TO BE IN YOUR PRESENCE, COINCIDENCE OR NOT.
I'VE LONG AWAITED AN OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK WITH YOU.
10
AND YET...
SHEER COINCIDENCE!
INDEED!
... BY MERE "COINCIDENCE"?
...AND YOU'RE HERE...
YOU THINK THAT I'M HERE...

...IT WAS ALSO ALWAYS MEANT TO BE.
"FATE" MIGHT BE A FITTING WORD FOR IT.
THOSE WHO SHARE INTERESTS ARE NATURALLY DRAWN TOGETHER.
...!
WELL ...
...I MUST SAY...
...AND CLEVER. QUITE A WINNING COMBI-NATION.
YOU ARE YOUNG, HAND-SOME...

DO YOU STILL REPRESENT "YAMATOYA," THE LARGE-SCALE MONEY EXCHANGER AND TRADING COMPANY?
WHAT DO YOU WANT WITH ME?
I BELIEVE OUR COUNTRY IS ON THE VERGE OF GREAT CHAOS.
THE SHOGUNATE HAS GROWN WEAK AND A WAR WILL SOON ARISE AMONG MIGHTY FORCES THAT SEEK CONTROL.
AT SUCH TIME YOU, OF COURSE, WILL WIELD THE GOLDEN CHRYSAN-THEMUM SEAL, THE SIGN OF THE EMPEROR.
I WOULD LIKE FOR YOU TO RELY UPON YAMATOYA FOR THE PROCURE-MENT OF ARMS, ARMOR AND SUPPLIES.
WE CAN PROVIDE YOU WITH THE GREAT-EST FIRE-ARMS AND CANNONS...
...THUS ENSURING AN EXPEDITIOUS END TO THE FAILING SHOGUNATE.
...

...HAH.
VERY WELL.
LET US REMAIN ON THESE GOOD TERMS, YAMATOYA-SAN.
EVEN IF YOUR "TRUE" INTERESTS LIE ELSE-WHERE.
GRIN
AS LONG AS IT DOES NOT HARM ME...
...IT SHALL NOT BE AN IMPEDIMENT.
NAZUKI, TSUMURI.
BRING IT OUT.

I HOPE YOU WILL ACCEPT THIS GIFT...
...AS A TOKEN OF APPRE-CIATION.
YOU MAY FIND IT SLIGHTLY HEAVY...
OH, MY...
...WHAT A DARLING LITTLE KITTEN.
...
TO TELL THE TRUTH, THIS DISCUSSION OF BUSINESS WAS ENTIRELY INCIDENTAL.
ITOU-SAMA...
IF I WERE TO TELL YOU MY "TRUE" AIMS...
WELL...

I AM SIMPLY...
...HOPING TO GROW CLOSER TO THE SHINSENGUMI... AND TO YOU, SIR.
THAT IS ALL I WANT.

130
TETSU-KUN, WHAT'S THE MATTER?
YOU'D BETTER GET OVER HERE AND PUT SOME SOY SAUCE ON THESE, OR...
Pop
ACK!
Coff hack
TETSU-KUUUN!
OH, COME ON.
DON'T KEEP STANDIN' AROUND OUTSIDE IN THE FREEZING COLD, SOUJI!
It keeps smoking!
Coff
coff
I'LL DO THE REST!
NO, NO, NO!
WHEN YOU COOK THESE, THEY GET TOTALLY BURNED ON BOTH SIDES.
I KNOW! THAT'S WHAT MAKES IT GOOD.

I'VE GOT THE SOY SAUCE AND SEAWEED PASTE, OKITA-SAN!
Sorry about the wait!
I'LL TAKE THOSE, THANKS.
OH, CRAP!
GACK!
SQUEEE! SQUEE, SQUEEE!!
DECEMBER OF THE FIRST YEAR OF KEIO ERA...

THE TIME PASSED MORE SLOWLY THAN EVER BEFORE...
...WITH A GRACE AND STILLNESS THAT RESEMBLED PEACE.
BUT AS ALL TURNED TO LOOK AROUND THEM...
... THEY WERE FACED WITH A VAGUE SENSE OF FEAR AND ANXIETY.
AND THUS THE WINTER OF 1865 CAME TO AN END.

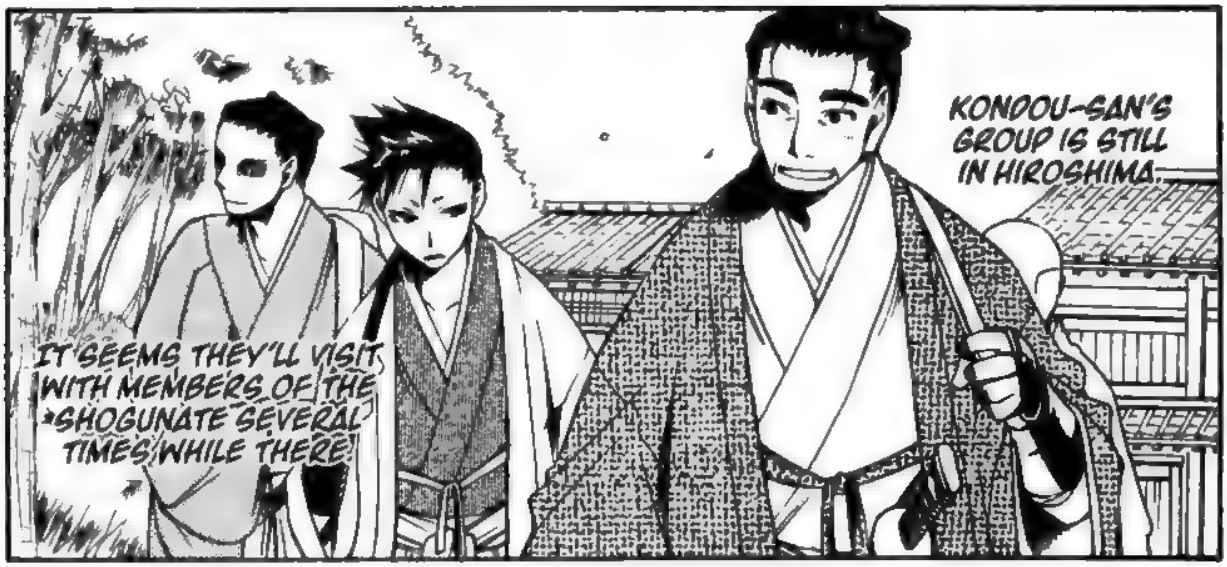
Chapter 18
Infiltration

AAAAAH!
I CAN'T TAKE IT ANY-MORE!
I'M ONLY HELPING OUT BECAUSE YOU SAID IT WOULD BE TWO OR THREE OF THEM!
WHY CAN'T YOU WRITE YOUR NEW YEAR'S CARDS ON YOUR OWN, HIJIKATA-SAN?
QUIT YOUR WHINING! I'M BUSY WRITING ALL OF KONDOU-SAN'S!
MOVE YOUR HANDS, NOT YOUR LIPS! THIS MUST BE FINISHED TODAY!
UMM, VICE COMMANDER, IF YOU DON'T MIND, I CAN HELP WRITE SOME, TOO.
Smack
NO. YOUR HANDWRITING IS ATROCIOUS.

Baaaaa!
Sob...
Sob...
...!
LOOK WHAT YOU DID! YOU MADE TETSU-KUN CRY!
You're a pig, Hijikata-san!
MAN UP! DON'T BLUBBER OVER SUCH A STUPID THING.
JUST GRIND SOME INK FOR US, AND THAT'LL BE FINE!
Nibble nibble
YES, SIR.

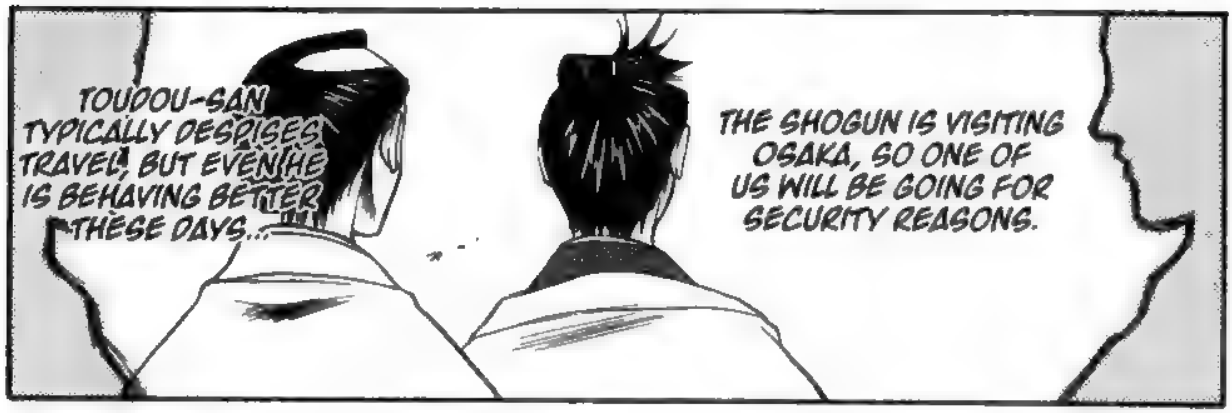
I'M NOT WRITING ANY MORE AFTER THIS, OKAY?
THIS IS THE LAST CARD, RIGHT?
YES, YES, I GET THE PICTURE.
Chirrrp...
Chip chip...
THE FIRST OF JANUARY ...
...YEAR TWO OF THE KEIO ERA.

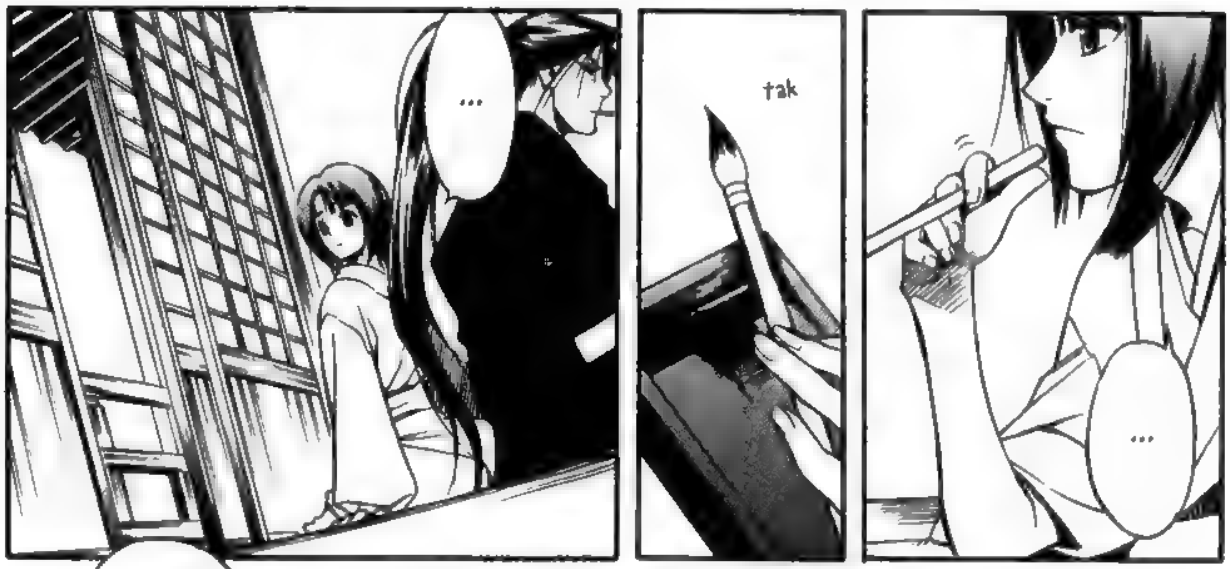
ICHIMURA TETSUNOSUKE-KUN.
THE BOY, ONCE SO TINY, SHALL BE SEVENTEEN YEARS OF AGE THIS YEAR.
...!
WAIT, I'M WRITING A MESSAGE FOR HIM. MAYBE I COULD ADD A LITTLE SOMETHING OF MY OWN...
HIS BROTHER'S WISTFUL COUNTENANCE SPEAKS TO THAT.
HE STILL DOESN'T LOOK HIS AGE, BUT HIS DEVELOPMENT IS PROMISING.
SIGH ...
...IF THIS PERSON DOESN'T KNOW THE ICHIMURAS, THIS WON'T MEAN ANYTHING TO HIM.
OH, WAIT...

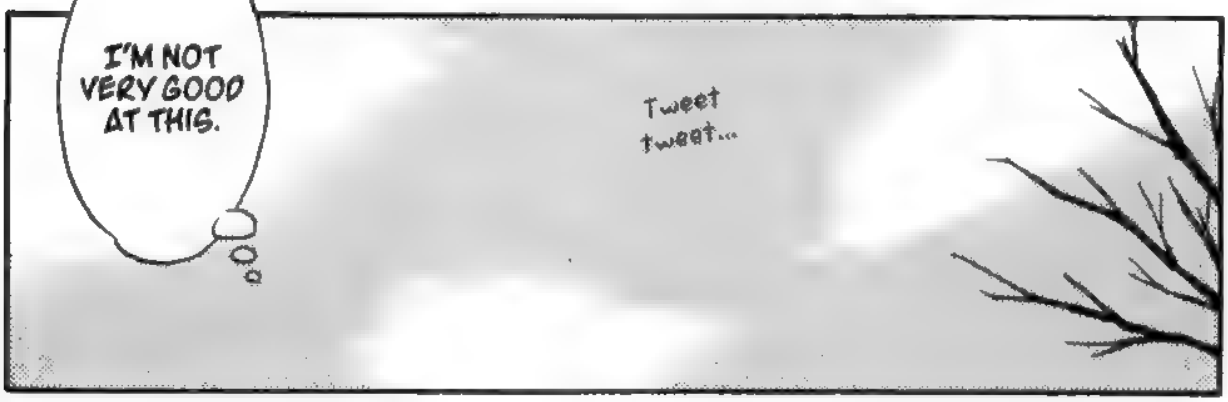

KONDOU-SAN'S GROUP IS STILL IN HIROSHIMA.
IT SEEMS THEY'LL VISIT WITH MEMBERS OF THE SHOGUNATE SEVERAL TIMES WHILE THERE.

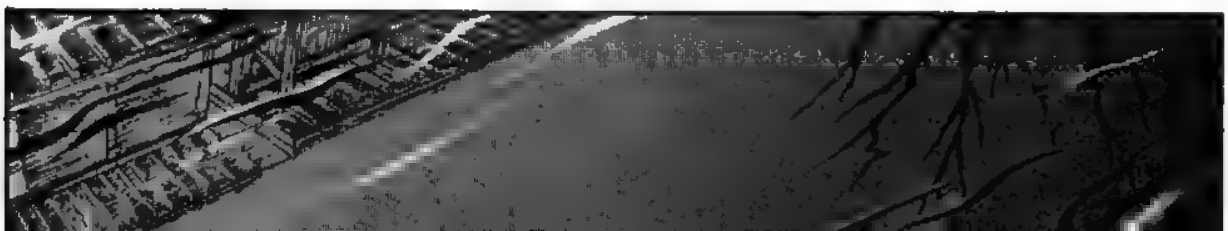
THIS IS ONLY GOING TO GIVE AWAY THE FACT THAT KONDOU-SAN ISN'T HERE.
I'm no good at this...
HE WILL BE A FINE ADDITION TO THE PROFESSION.
WHEN YAMAZAKI-SAN RETURNS, HE WILL BE A CERTIFIED DOCTOR.

HOWEVER, THE RESTRAINT THEY HAVE SHOWN OF LATE SPEAKS TO THE ABSENCE OF ONE OF OUR NUMBER.
NAGAKURA-SAN AND HARADA-SAN ARE STILL A SOURCE OF MUCH HUMOR.


TOUDOU-SAN TYPICALLY DESPISES TRAVEL, BUT EVEN HE IS BEHAVING BETTER THESE DAYS...
THE SHOGUN IS VISITING OSAKA, SO ONE OF US WILL BE GOING FOR SECURITY REASONS.


...
tak
...


I'M NOT VERY GOOD AT THIS.
Tweet tweet...



EXCEL-
LENT
WORK,
MILORD
SAKA-
MOTO!
...WOULD
HAVE SNUCK
INTO KYOTO
TO MAKE
THE TALKS
WORK--
I'M AFRAID
TO ADMIT
THAT IF YOU'D
BEEN CAUGHT,
KATSURA-
SENSEI AND I...
SLIPPING
THROUGH
ALL OF
THAT
SECURITY!
...!!!

Ba-bump ba-bump
Ba-bump ba-bump
RETAINER OF CHOUSHUU--KATSURA KOGOROU
...IT'S AFTER SOME TERRIBLE SHOCK?! IS IT THAT AMUSING TO SCARE ME?!
WHY IS IT THAT EVERY TIME I SEE YOU...
WHA... WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS?!
WHA--! WHY, I...
ONE O' THEM SHIBA PUPPY DOGS!
Y'KNOW WHAT YOU LOOK LIKE?
Awww!
AWWW, SEE, YOU ALWAYS GOT THAT LI'L SHIVERY, QUAVERY, DEWY LOOK IN YER EYES! IT'S JUST ADORABLE!
THIS IS JUST THE PROBLEM WITH LARGE MEN! ALL THIS NONSENSE ABOUT "CUTENESS"--
NOW, NOW, DON'TCHA START CRYIN' ON ME.
...
HOW DARE YOU, SIR! DO YOU TAKE ME FOR A FOOL?! I AM A FULL-GROWN MAN WHO HAS PLEDGED HIS BLOOD AND LIFE IN THE SERVICE OF HIS COUNTRY!!

IS THIS MAN REALLY KATSURA KOGOROU?
なに
Yip
Yipp
Yip
Yip
RYOUMA...
UN-HAND ME, RUFFIAN, OR I'LL...
Yip
Escape tunnel!!
...!!
KATSURA-SAN, KATSURA-SAN! THIS IS MY PARTNER! CALM DOWN!
...
THE MAN LOOKS LIKE A LITTLE CHILD.
ONE PAT ON THE HEAD FROM SAIGOU, AND HE'LL BE DEAD.
!!
SH-SHE'S NOT ...AMERI-CAN?
BUT... SHE LOOKS...
ONLY HALF, KATSURA-SAN!
SHE'S THE PRODUCT OF AMERICA AND JAPAN.

...SO I SUPPOSE I'LL BE IN CHARGE OF PROTECTING YOU ON THE WAY TO KYOTO.
WELL, I AM THIS MAN'S HIRED BODYGUARD, HOWEVER RELUCTANTLY...
...HMPH.
Flinch
Flinch
UH...
OKAY...
GREET-INGS.
I WANT YOU TO CALL ME "SARA."
なで
なで
UGH...
SARA! YOU SHOULDN'T CALL KATSURA-SAN A "LITTLE CHILD"! YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND WHAT HE'S BEEN THROUGH!
ACK!
Whiiine...
ピル
ピル
ピル

NO PUPPIES! NO! I'VE PUT MYSELF INTO ABSOLUTE PERIL! DANGER LIKE YOU'VE NEVER SEEN!
...HE'S EVEN DISGUISED HIMSELF AS AN "ABANDONED PUPPY" LIVING UNDER A BRIDGE AND TREMBLING AGAINST THE HARSH ELEMENTS!!
Whimper
SHIVER SHIVER
GIVE ME A HOME
HE'S TAKEN ON MANY ROLES AND ESCAPED FROM MANY FOES IN ORDER TO COLLECT INTELLIGENCE...
HE'S INFILTRATED ENEMY TERRITORY FOR THE SAKE OF HIS HOME!

Shhhh!
KATSURA-SENSEI!
OH... YOU'RE RIGHT.
Eeeep!
WE'LL BE FOUND AND ARRESTED IF YOU KEEP SHOUTING LIKE THAT!
NO, NO, NO! IKUMATSU WAS MY LOVER, NOT MY OWNER!!!
HIS DARLING LOOKS WERE SO ARRESTING THAT HE WAS TAKEN IN BY ONE WHO WISHED TO MOTHER, PET AND NURTURE HIM...

EXCELLENT! YOU ARE WELL PREPARED, SIR!
OH, DON'T WORRY! I KNOWS HOW MUCH YA WORRY WHEN YOU'RE NOT IN DISGUISE, SO I BROUGHT YOU SOMETHIN'!

Twitch
I CANNOT HELP BUT BE NERVOUS, DRESSED AS PLAINLY AS I AM NOW...
A-AND YOU'RE CERTAIN THAT NO ONE SUSPICIOUS IS ABOUT?

...
...
STOP THAT, RYOUMA.
POOR SEN-SEI...
waahhh...
Rowf
rowr
rowr!
Yip
yip
yip!
...!!
...!!!
NER-VOUS ?!
...?
HUH?!
...BUT IT'S NOT RIGHT TO TAKE IT OUT ON OTHERS.
I KNOW YOU'RE NERVOUS ABOUT THIS...

...
I CAN'T HELP IT.
THIS MEETING WILL DETERMINE THE FUTURE OF JAPAN.
I HAVE TO THANK YOU ONCE AGAIN, KATSURA-SAN.
I'M MIGHTY HEARTENED THAT YOU'D COME THIS FAR ON THE WORD OF A SIMPLE RONIN LIKE ME.

OH... STOP IT, YOU...
PEOPLE WHO DON'T KNOW YOU THINK, "OH HE'S A COWARD, HE'LL RUN FOR HIS LIFE..."
...BUT I KNOW YOU'RE A GREAT AND MIGHTY MAN WHO SEES THE TRUTH FOR WHAT IT IS!
IT'S ENOUGH TO MAKE A MAN ACT LIKE A GELDING.
IF THIS MEETING GOES SOUTH, WE COULD WIND UP OUT OF THE FRYING PAN RIGHT INTO THE FIRE.
AND I AP-PRECIATE YOUR COMING HERE, TOO.
IF IT COMES TO IT, I'LL ACT AS A DECOY.
Y'ALL NEED TO STAY ALIVE AND FORM THE ALLIANCE.
AT ANY RATE, OUR FIRST STEP IS TO MAKE IT INTO SATSUMA'S MANSION IN KYOTO.

HA
HA

I, SAKAMOTO RYOUMA, THE PEACEMAKER...
...HEREBY RISK MY LIFE FOR THE SAKE OF THE "SATCHOU ALLIANCE"!!

...WE'VE GOT ONE PROBLEM!
HOW-EVER, YOU SHOULD KNOW...
WHISTLER
THE SHIP'S ALL READY TO LEAVE.
AHH, EXCELLENT.
THE SHINSEN-GUMI?!
THERE WASN'T A SINGLE ONE OF THEM HERE BEFORE!
LIKELY THEY WERE HIDING OUT AT THE ADJACENT BOATHOUSE.

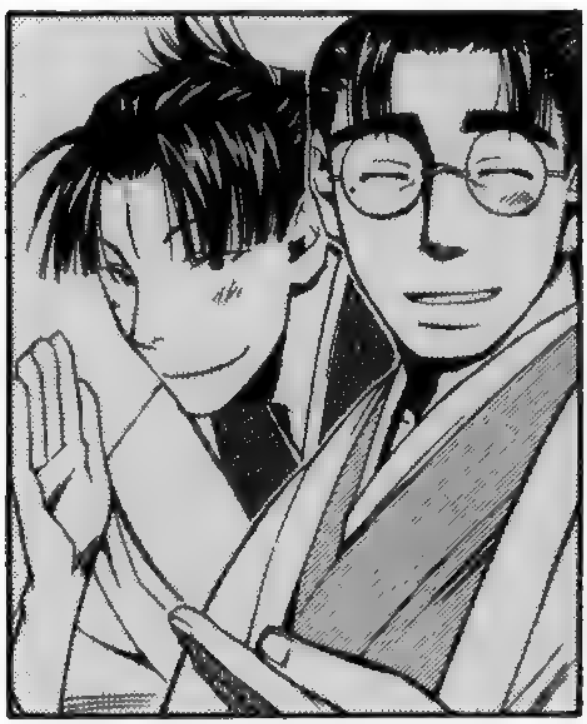
THE EIGHTH SQUAD.
ALL THE WORSE LUCK WE'VE GOT.
WE'LL HAVE TO WAIT HERE UNTIL THEY LEAVE...
THIS ISN'T GOING TO WORK.
CAN'T DO THAT NEITHER.
TOMORROW, THEY'RE LIKELY TO STAY AT THIS BOATHOUSE AND CHECK EVERY NOOK AND CRANNY OF THE BUILDING.
...THAT BOTH YOU AND I KNOW TOO WELL.
IT MEANS THERE'S ONE OF THEM...

CAPTAIN TOUDOU, WE'VE FINISHED CHECKING THE CARGO!
NOTHING SUSPICIOUS AMONG THE PAS-SENGERS.
YOU MAY GO. BE CAREFUL.
RIGHT Y'ARE.
CAPTAIN! OVER THERE...
...?

"SAITANIYA" ISN'T A NAME FROM SATSUMA...
KIMOTSUKI KOTAROU AND THREE EMPLOYEES.
SAITANIYA, OFFICIAL TRADERS OF SATSUMA DOMAIN.

IN THE OPEN
WELL PLAYED, KATSURA-SAN!
MY FATHER REQUESTED THAT WE ACQUIRE THEM IN KYOTO...
AND WHAT ARE THESE SWORDS FOR?

おどおど
THANK THE GODS FOR DISGUISES!
AHH, WELL, WE MOVED THERE FROM HIGO, FIVE GENER-ATIONS AGO...



...!

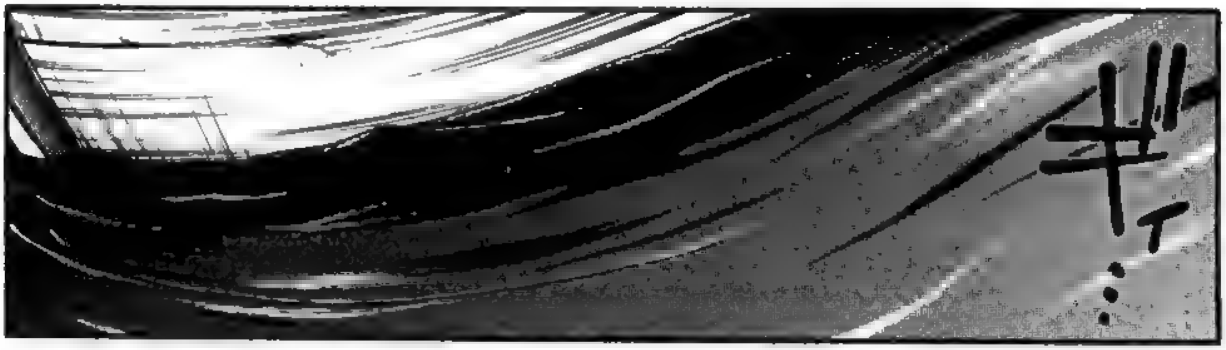
SO, WHAT NOW?
Ba-bump
Ba-bump
THEY DON'T EVEN NEED TO SEE MY FACE. THEY'LL KNOW ME IF THEY EVEN HEAR MY VOICE...
Gulp
Ba-bump
Ba-bump
Ba-bump
Ba-bump
...
Ba-bump
...
Ba-bump
ba-bump

CAPTAIN TOUDOU.
Peel
WOULD YOU MIND...
...A WORD IN PRIVATE?
...

PLUS, I CAN'T IMAGINE HOW YOU'D LET YOURSELF BE CAUGHT LIKE THIS.
AS A MAN FROM THE SAME BACKGROUND, IT MAKES ME FEEL ASHAMED.
YEAH. ABOUT THAT...
Click
THAT DOESN'T EVEN COUNT AS BEING A "DISGUISE."
EVEN WITH THE BEARD, IT'S TOO OBVIOUS.
WE'RE BOTH GRAD-UATES OF THE HOKUSHIN ITTO STYLE.
DON'T S'POSE YOU'D BE WILLING TO OVERLOOK OUR LITTLE ENCOUNTER?

"LISTEN TO ME, HEISUKE."
...
...
I WANT YOU TO FIND HIM BEFORE ANYONE ELSE IN THE GROUP.
YOU HAVE SEEN SAKAMOTO RYOUMA BEFORE? YOU CAN RECOG-NIZE HIM?
AND WHEN YOU DO...
IS THAT UNDER-STOOD?
...I WOULD LIKE YOU TO LET HIM ESCAPE WITHOUT ALERTING ANY OTHER MEMBERS.

ACTUALLY...
...I WASN'T PLANNING TO HAVE YOU ARRESTED, WHETHER YOU PULLED A GUN ON ME OR NOT.
...?
SEE...
...I'M TIRED...
I'M TIRED OF WATCHING MY MEN DIE.



HEY, THE CAPTAIN CLEARED 'EM. JUST GOTTA LET IT GO.
DAMN IT ALL.
IT'S CLEAR THERE'S SOMETHING FISHY WITH THEM, BUT...

?
SPEAKING OF WHICH, WHERE IS THE CAPTAIN?

I DIDN'T THINK WE WOULD ACTUALLY GET PAST THEM.
THAT WAS A BALL-BUSTER!
WOOOOW!

SEE, IT ALL COMES DOWN TO SPIRIT AND PERSEVER-ANCE!
SAITANIYA IS MY OLD FAMILY BACK IN TOSA.

STILL, IT WAS TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT.
ABSOLUTELY! WITH A GOOD DISGUISE, THERE'S NOTHING TO BE AFRAID OF!
BOLD.
Sigh...
I GOTTA SAY, I'M SIMPLY AMAZED AT THE SHEER BOLDNESS OF YOUR ACT, KATSURA-SAN!
I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU CONVINCED HIM NOT TO HAUL US IN...
...BUT IT'S A GOOD THING HE WAS THE ONE IN CHARGE.
INDEED...
...IS ALREADY BREAKING APART...
THE SHINSENGUMI...

ONCE THIS ALLIANCE IS OVER...
...I'D BEST GO OVER AND CLEAN UP THAT SITUATION...
JANUARY 21ST OF THE SECOND YEAR OF KEIO ERA, 1866...
SATSUMA AND CHOUSHUU SIGNED A MILITARY TREATY COMPRISING SIX CONDITIONS.
IT WAS THE CREATION OF THE SATCHOU ALLIANCE, A CRUCIAL TURNING POINT OF THE BAKUMATSU PERIOD.

AAAAHHH!!!
AWW, HELL! I COMPLETELY AND TOTALLY FORGOT!!
ARE YOU CHICKENING OUT ON US, ICHIMURA?!
HEY, THERE ARE STILL THIRTEEN TO GO!
SO WHAT?!
I GOTTA GET TO WORK!!
WELL, WHAT'M I SUPPOSED TO DO?!
FFFh...

HUFF!
HUFF!
thud thud thud thud
THWOMP WHAM
DAAHH!!
"RAIN-BOW OF MAPLE"... NO.
"FLEETING PATHOS"...NO. "HIDDEN"... SOMETHING? NOT QUITE.
ICHI-MURA...
AAGH...
THAT ONE STINGS!
TADAAA
AT LEAST I'M NOT SPILLING YOUR TEA ANY MORE! ☆
YOU WON'T NEED TO WORRY ABOUT IT SPILLING IF YOU STOP TRIP-PING!!
BUT LOOK!
I-I-I'M S-SORRY!
THANKS TO YOUR BUMBLING, MY FUTURE MASTER-PIECE HAS VANISHED FROM MY GRASP...

WELL?
HOW DID IT GO THIS TIME?
Huh?
UM...
HMPH.
ANOTHER "BATTLE AGAINST FIFTY," I SUPPOSE?
I SEE.
AND HOW MANY WOULD IT BE...
Mutter
I GOT... MAYBE SEVEN?
...
UMM...
...IF IT HAD BEEN AN ACTUAL BATTLE?

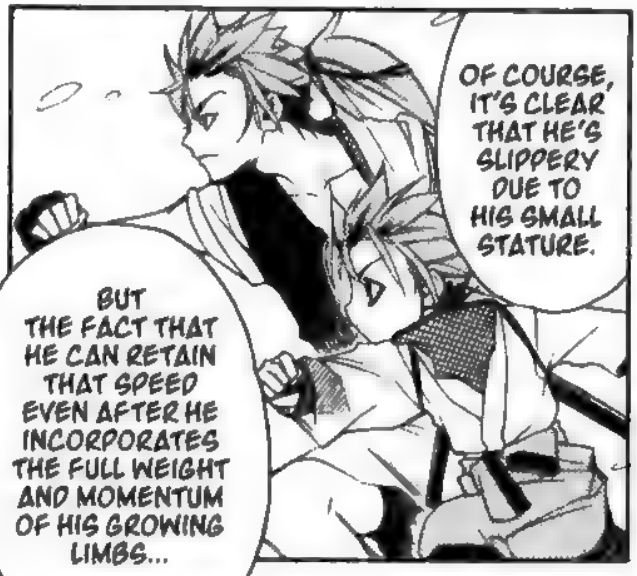
Chapter 19
Present
FORTY!!

ENOUGH THAT IT'S ALMOST A WASTE JUST TO HAVE HIM SWINGING HIS SWORD IN THE DOJO!
TETSU-CHAN'S REALLY MADE LEAPS AND BOUNDS!
YOU KNOW, IT'S TRUE.
...!

YOU FOOL.
ARE YOU EVEN WATCHING HIM?
Like these guys...
Come on...
?
DO YOU REALLY THINK SO? THE ONLY PEOPLE HE CAN BEAT ARE THE NEWEST MEMBERS OF THE GROUP.

Gahaha!
AS THE VICE COMMANDER SAYS, "IT AIN'T A FIGHT UNLESS IT'S GOT KICKS TO THE BALLS, EYES POKED OUT, AND A GOOD TRIP OR TWO"!!
HE'S NOT WORTH MUCH IN A GENTLE-MAN'S DUEL...
...BUT YOU'LL NEVER AMBUSH HIM OUT IN THE REAL WORLD.
A PURE OUTDOORS BATTLER.
HE'S JUST LIKE HIJIKATA-SAN.

LET ME TELL YOU, THERE WAS A FIRE IN HIS EYES!
Wow!
R-REALLY? THAT FAST?
Dooh
murmur
Murmur
HE MOVED LIKE THE WIND!
I WISH YOU GUYS COULD HAVE SEEN TETSU-CHAN WHEN THINGS WENT DOWN AT IKEDAYA!


OF COURSE, IT'S CLEAR THAT HE'S SLIPPERY DUE TO HIS SMALL STATURE.
BUT THE FACT THAT HE CAN RETAIN THAT SPEED EVEN AFTER HE INCORPORATES THE FULL WEIGHT AND MOMENTUM OF HIS GROWING LIMBS...

Whee whee!
?!

?

IT IS THE RESULT OF OKITA SOUJI'S EXCELLENT TRAINING.
MAY-BE.
...IS DUE TO ONE THING.

STOMP
AAAAHHH!!
W-WHAT'S GOING ON WITH ALL THE NEW MEMBERS?!
STOMP
NO ME!!
STOMP
STOMP
STOMP
STOMP
OKITA-SENSEI!!
SENSEI!! PLEASE GIVE ME THE BENEFIT OF YOUR TRAINING!!
NO, FORGET HIM! TEACH ME!!
Aaahh
Eeee

THEY'RE NOT JUST BRUISES.
MY KNEES AND MY BACK-BONE ARE HURTING THESE DAYS.
YOU JUST WANT ME TO LOOK AT YOUR BRUISES?
IF YOU'RE THAT WORRIED, I CAN OPEN YOU UP AND TAKE A LOOK.
YOU'D BETTER BE JOKING!
I AM.
Idiot.
EXCUSE ME IF I DON'T BELIEVE YOU!
Shudder
YOU WERE "JOKING" ABOUT THAT LAST TIME, RIGHT BEFORE YOU SPLIT MIMURA'S STOMACH RIGHT OPEN!!
And laughing the entire time!!
HE HAD APPEN-DICITIS.
WELL?
HAVE YOU MEASURED YOUR HEIGHT?

I'M GOING TO TAKE A GUESS...
...
Aaahhhh...
HELL YEAH! WAIT UNTIL YOU HEAR THIS!
I'VE GROWN ANOTHER THREE WHOLE INCHE--
CRICK
...AND CALL THIS "GROWING PAINS."
IT'S NOT A CONDITION OF ANY SORT. JUST LET IT SORT ITSELF OUT.
Yeow...
"GROWING PAINS"?
I DON'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT IT.
IT'S A SIMPLE CASE OF QUICK GROWTH...
...AND YOUR BONES AND MUSCLES ARE SCREAMING IN AGONY TRYING TO KEEP UP.
YOU'RE JUST A LITTLE SQUIRT WHO'S GROWING TOO FAST.
SHUT UP!
FINE. I'LL PUT UP WITH THE PAIN...
Heh.

Ha hah.
IS THAT SO?
IF YOU'RE GOING TO DO THAT, MIGHT AS WELL OUTGROW THAT LUMBERING GIANT, TOO.
?
Heh!
...BUT I COULD OUTGROW YOU IN THE END.
HUH? OH!
...MAYBE HE'LL EASE OFF ON THE MOLLY-COODLING.
BECAUSE ONCE YOU'RE TALLER THAN HIM...
And what's with that outfit?!
LOOK AT YOU!
DON'T HIDE OUT IN THIS STUFFY MEDICINE CLOSET ALL DAY!
IF EVEN THE COODLED ONE IS AWARE OF IT...
SIGH
TETSUUUU!!!
YOU MEAN MY BROTHER.

COME ON NOW.
WHAT DO YOU WANT, TATSU-NII?
Sob Sob
GOT SLAP-PED BY BOTH AT ONCE...
LOOK WHO'S TALKING.
Uh...
So snarky and bad-mouthed!
SPEND ALL YOUR TIME INDOORS, AND YOU'LL BE SICKLY AND GLOOMY JUST LIKE THAT PIN-CUSHION OVER THERE!
Lives indoors all day lately.
YOUR BIG BRO PULLED AN ALL-NIGHTER FIXING THIS!
TADAAAH!!
Spin
AND LOOK! I EVEN INCLUDED A NICE PATCH OF YOUR FAVORITE PATTERN!
WHAT?! WHERE DID YOU PUT THAT?! AND WHY?! IT LOOKS RIDICULOUS!!
NO MATTER HOW MUCH MONEY HE HAS, A MAN NEEDS TO MAKE THE MOST OF WHAT HE BUYS.
PLUS, IT'S A WASTE TO TRASH CLOTHING YOU CAN STILL WEAR!
WHAT?! YOU SEWED UP ONE OF MY OLD OUTFITS AGAIN? YOU KNOW I'M NOT GOING TO WEAR IT!
DON'T BE STUPID! FALL IS COMING AND YOU CAN'T WALK AROUND WITH SO MUCH BARE SKIN!

...
COME ON, JUST TRY IT ON.
DO I HAVE TO?
Ugh, shut up...
YOU JUST... KEEP... GROWING!
Like a weed!!
Sob, sob...
Sniff...
Heh heh heh.
OH, COME ON, TATSUNII. I KNOW YOU'RE HAPPY, BUT DON'T CRY ABOUT IT.
CHILDREN CAN BE CRUEL SOMETIMES...
I'M GONNA STEP OUT FOR A BIT ONCE I'M DONE EATING.
OH, YEAH? RUN AN ERRAND FOR ME, KID.
YEAH, ME TOO.

WHY DO YOU NEED TO KNOW?
WHAT ARE YOU USING THESE FOR?
THEY'LL MAKE FOR GOOD MEDICINES. DIDN'T YOU KNOW THAT?
This is all pretty fishy.
...
OH YEAH? WHATEVER.
I CAN GET ALL OF THESE THINGS AT OGURAYA, RIGHT?
...!
farewell
SEE YOU LATER!
THAT'S CLOSE TO THE HABERDASHERY, SO IT'S A QUICK TRIP.
Mutter
THE HABERDASHERY
...
HE'S BUYING A PRESENT FOR A GIRL. BUT WHO?
Mutter
PROBABLY THAT "OSAYA" FROM SHIMABARA.
HE'S BEEN LURED BY ADULTHOOD'S SWEETEST PROMISE...
LURED? GOD HELP US...

Chirp chirp
AND IF YOU'VE GOT SUCH STRONG PATERNAL URGES, WHY DON'T YOU JUST POP OUT YOUR OWN KID ALREADY?
AND YOU SHOULD LOOK ME IN THE EYE WHEN YOU JOKE LIKE THAT.
YOU OUGHT TO SAY THAT TO HIS FACE.
That one's a killer.
COULD HIS SUDDEN GROWTH COME FROM ILLICIT EXPERIENCES? IN THAT CASE, THE ONLY TREATMENT HE DESERVES IS CASTRATION...
Beng be-ben
Ben beng
OH, YOU!
YOU ARE SO LATE!!
I'M HERE TO ESCORT!!
HEYAAA! IT'S ICHI-MURA!

OH COME ON, TAKE IT EASY. WHAT'S THE HARM?
HE IS SO INSENSI-TIVE!!
OHANA
Hmph.
HOW CAN IT TAKE YOU LONGER TO GET READY THAN HER? WHAT KIND OF MAKE-UP DID YOU PUT ON?!
Ben ben beng
Beng beng
OH DEAR ...
...BUT YOU WERE LATE, AND NOW THE TEACHER'S HERE!
YOU HAD THE PERFECT CHANCE TO SNEAK HER OUT...
Beng beng

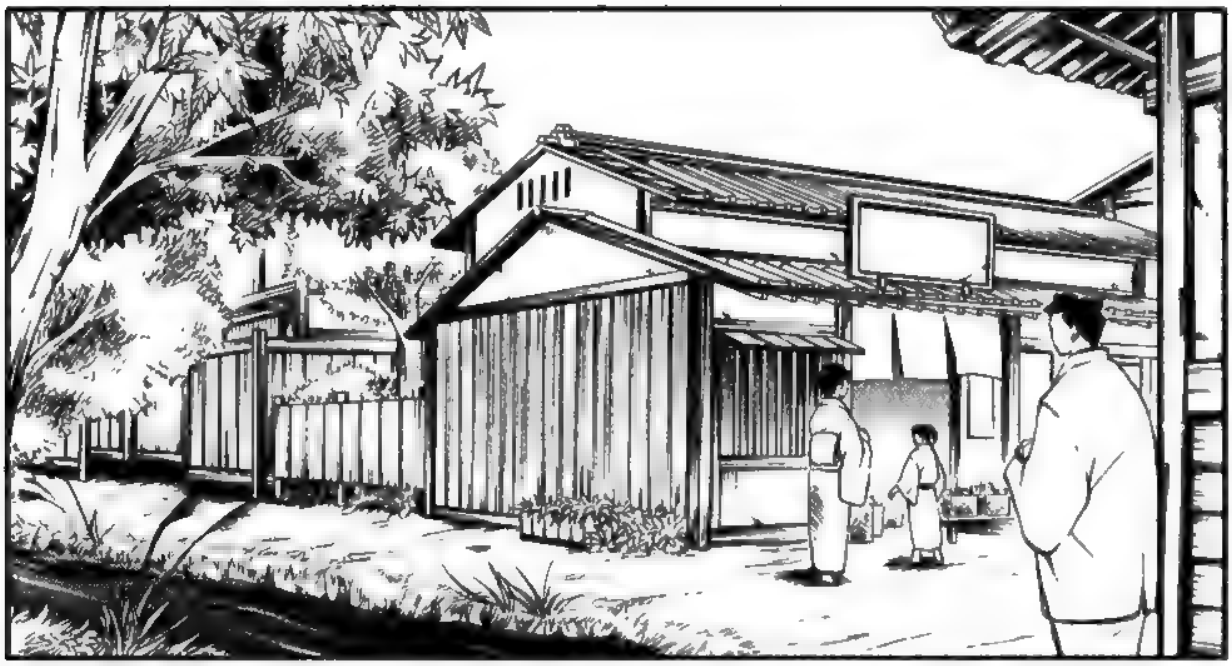
AWW! WELL, I COULD KEEP YOU COMPANY, IF YOU WANTED...
?
...BUT I DON'T WANT TO GET TOO CLOSE, AND HURT OSAYA'S FEELINGS.
?
FINE, I'LL JUST SIT AND WAIT UNTIL SHE'S DONE.
I LOVE THE SOUND OF SAYA'S SHAMISEN PLAYING.
...
THE SOUND OF SAYA'S PLAYING...
...SOOTHES BOTH NERVES AND SOUL.
Be- beng beng
Ben ben...

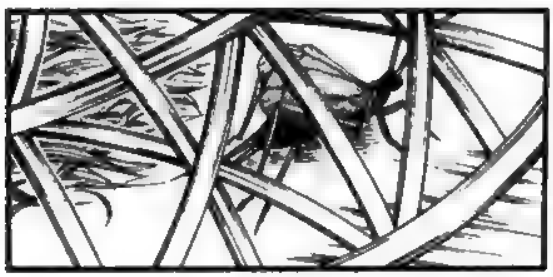
Beng beng
Ben...
SAYA!

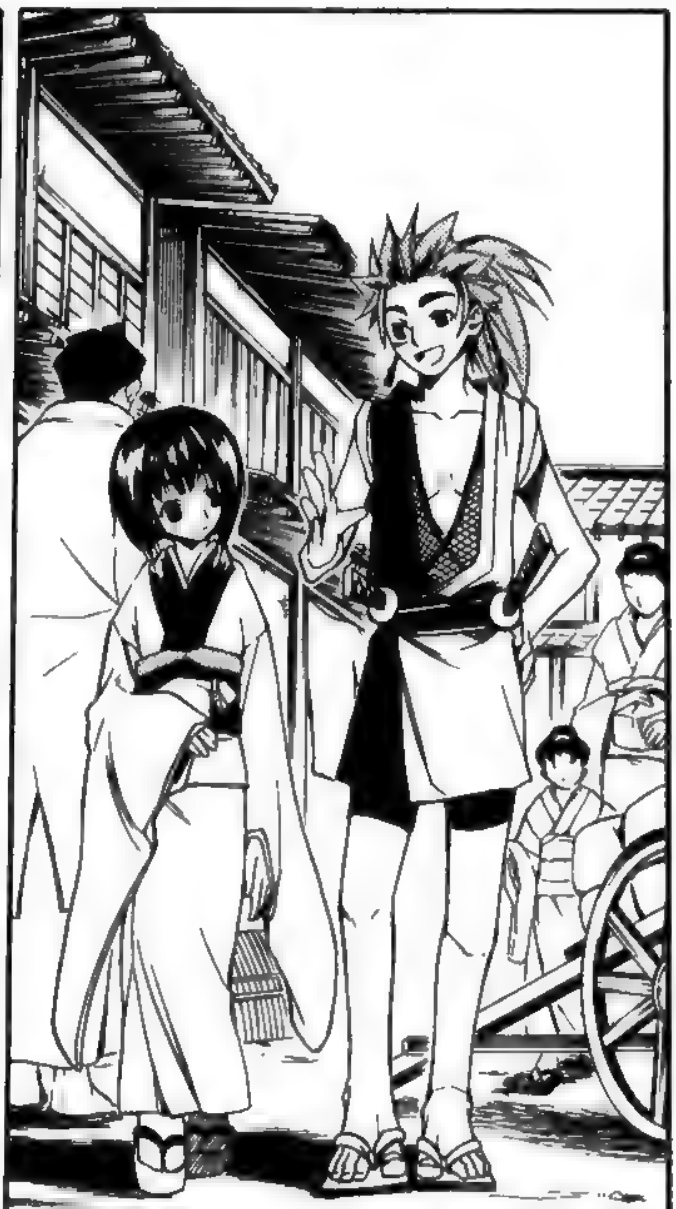
SORRY I'M LATE. DIDN'T MEAN TO FORCE YOU INTO PRACTICING...
...!

OKAY, YOU TWO!
Hee hee
Hee hee
YOU JUST TAKE YOUR TIME AND ENJOY YOURSELVES TODAY!

AND IF YOU HAVE TO END UP SPENDING THE NIGHT, I THINK I CAN GET YOU CLEARED.
Eek!
....!!
Shake Shake Shake
OH, SORRY. I CAN'T!
WE'VE GOT A CURFEW RULE. NO STAYING THE NIGHT OUT OF THE DORM!
Ha ha!
They'd kill me.
YOU INSEN-SITIVE CLOD...







!
I'LL BE WATCHING OVER YOU...
...TETSU.

...?
WHAT WOULD SUZU...
SAYA? WHAT'S WRONG ...?
...THINK OF ME NOW?
WHY NOT WALK TO THE OUTSKIRTS OF TOWN?
?
WE'VE GOT SOME FREE TIME.
HEY, SAYA!

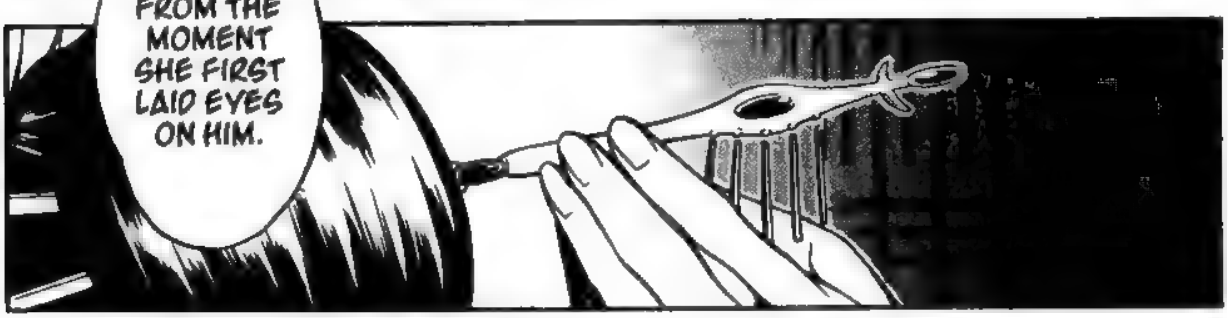
LET'S TRY SOMETHING WE CAN ONLY DO WHEN IT'S HOT!
OKAY, IT'S STILL A BIT TOO COLD!
STICK YOUR LEGS IN, SAYA! IT'LL FEEL NICE!
...
SLOSH
BWAAH!

ポポ
ポ
ハァ
ハァ
AAH.
チャー

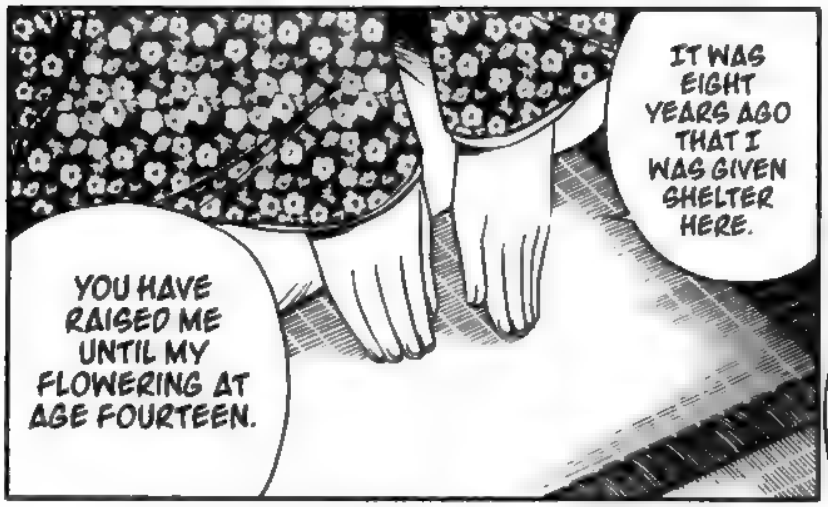
BWAAH!
!
SAYA...
チャプ。
チャプ。
UMM, HEY.
I DOVE UNDER WATER...
...AND I FOUND SOME-THING NEAT.
コポポポ

...!
IT'S FOR YOU.

TETSU-CHAN HAS BEEN LIKE "GOD" TO HER.


FROM THE MOMENT SHE FIRST LAID EYES ON HIM.

I, ON THE OTHER HAND...
...NEVER MET MY "GOO"...
...WHILE I WAS STILL PURE.
...
OHANA ...
THERE'S NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT, OKIYO-SAN.
I HAVE BEEN PREPARING FOR THIS DAY...
...EVER SINCE I CAME HERE.
OHANA.


IT WAS EIGHT YEARS AGO THAT I WAS GIVEN SHELTER HERE.
YOU HAVE RAISED ME UNTIL MY FLOWERING AT AGE FOURTEEN.

ARE YOU READY?
OKAMI-SAN.

AS OF TONIGHT, I, HANA...
...WILL BEGIN MY SERVICE AS A COURTESAN, IN ORDER TO REPAY MY MANY DEBTS TO THE HOUSE.

第弐拾話 Chapter 20 選 Choice

だいにじゅうわ　せん

YOU MIND REPEATIN' THAT LAST BIT?
HEY...
...I WILL BE GOING WITH ITOU-SAN'S GROUP.
AS I SAID...

I'M GOING TO LEAVE THE SHINSEN-GUMI...
...AND JOIN THE "GUARDS OF EMPEROR KOUMEI'S TOMB."
IT WILL BE THE LAST I SEE OF ALL OF YOU.
...
WAIT A MINUTE...
ARE YOU GONNA COMMIT SEPPUKU? YOU KNOW YOU CAN'T--
I HAVE RECEIVED OFFICIAL PERMISSION TO LEAVE.
...
WHAT ARE YOU TALKIN' ABOUT?

...THE COMMANDER AND VICE COMMANDER RAISED ABSOLUTELY NO ARGUMENT REGARDING MY DECISION.
...!!
IF YOU HAVE A LEGITIMATE, OFFICIAL REASON TO LEAVE, THERE'S NO REASON YOU CAN'T. BESIDES...
IT APPEARS THEY WILL BE IN CHARGE OF GUARDING LORD TODA YAMATO, THE HEAD OF THE IMPERIAL TOMB OFFICE.
THE GUARDS OF THE IMPERIAL TOMB IS A SPECIAL GROUP THAT ITOU-SAN WAS DIRECTED TO FORM BY THE EMPEROR HIMSELF.
I'M ASKING WHY YOU WANT TO LEAVE!!
WHO GIVES A DAMN ABOUT ITOU AND HIS GROUP?!
ARE YOU REALLY THAT STUPID?!
SHUT YOUR MOUTH, HARADA.
Tsk.
WHAT GOOD REASON DO YOU HAVE FOR QUITTING THE SHINSENGUMI?!
DON'T GIVE ME A HALF-ASSED EXCUSE AND ACT LIKE IT MAKES SENSE!!

...
I WON'T BE LEAVING KYOTO.
ISOLATION?!
AND REALLY, IT'S MORE LIKE ISOLATION THAN COMPLETE SECESSION FROM THE GROUP.
IT'S NOTHING TO GET SO WORKED UP ABOUT.
ALL THE WAY OVER THERE?
I WILL BE STAYING AT ZENRITSU TEMPLE ON 5TH AVENUE.
WHEN ARE YOU COMING BACK?! WHERE'LL YOU EAT? AND SLEEP?
SO... IT'S LIKE A BUSINESS OUTING OR SOMETHING?
Graaah!
I JUST DON'T GET IT!! YOU'VE BEEN A CORE MEMBER OF THE GROUP SINCE ITS VERY INCEPTION!!
WHY THE HELL WOULD YOU LEAVE NOW?!
Graaah!
LISTEN, HARADA...
WHAAA?!
IT WAS MY OWN DECISION.
THE COMMANDER? VICE COMMANDER?!
DAMMIT, WHO THE HELL GAVE YOU THOSE RIDICULOUS ORDERS?!

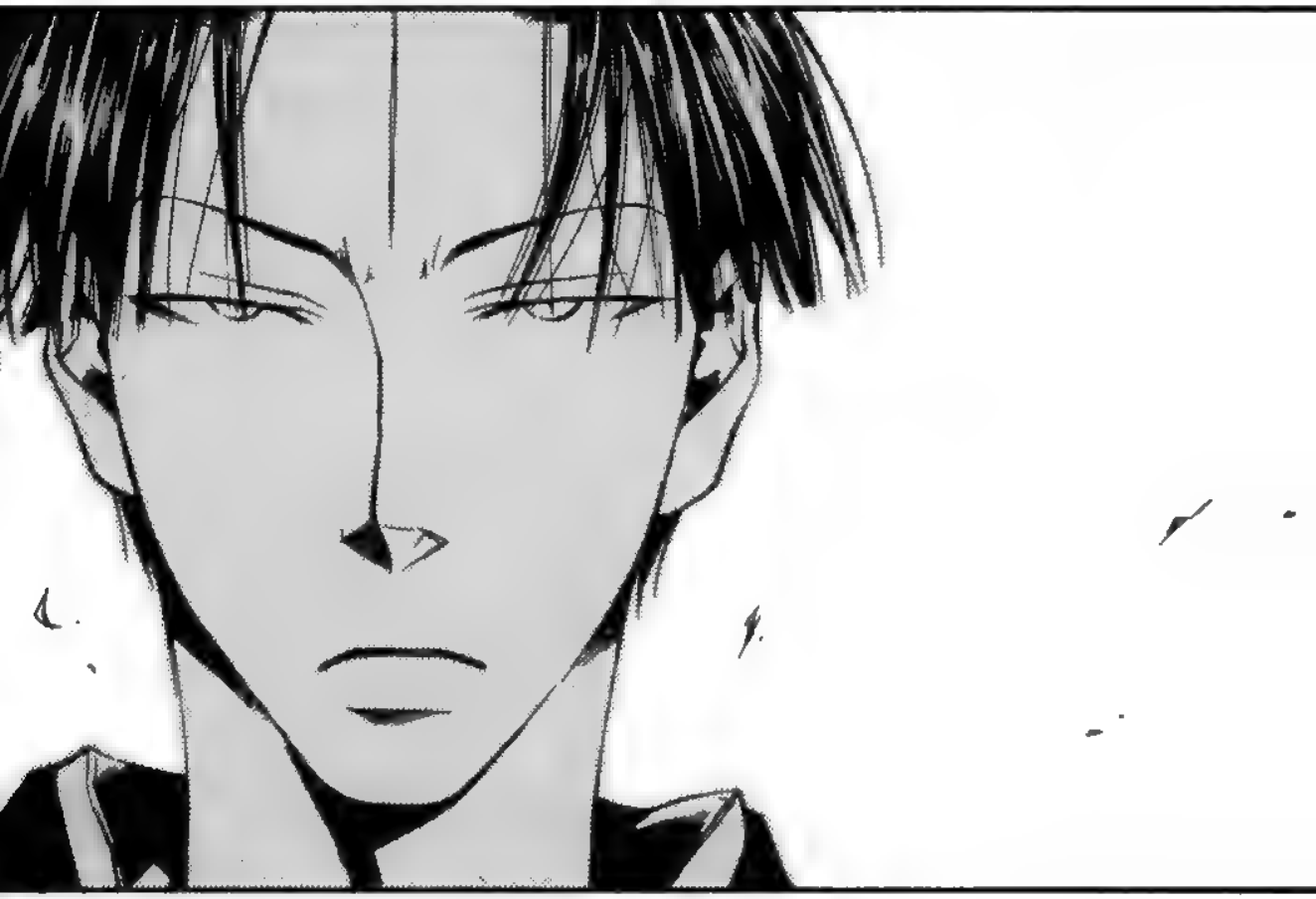
IS THERE SOME REASON THAT I SHOULD STICK WITH YOU BASTARDS FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE?
I'VE KNOWN ITOU-SAN AND HIS GROUP FOR YEARS, AS FELLOW STUDENTS OF THE HOKUSHIN ITTO SCHOOL.
PLUS, GUARDING GRAVES IS A MUCH EASIER JOB THAN RISKING MY LIFE ON A REGULAR BASIS.
OR IS THERE SOMETHING ELSE YOU WANTED TO SAY?
I THOUGHT WE WERE FRIENDS!!

I'M NOT GOING TO STOP YOU, OF COURSE.
I JUST WANT TO KNOW.
IS THAT SO?
WELL, WE SHOULD REMAIN ON GOOD TERMS EVEN AFTER I LEAVE, THEN.
HEI-SUKE.
HOW MANY DAYS DID IT TAKE YOU TO MAKE THIS DECISION?
...
SHINPACHI-SAN.

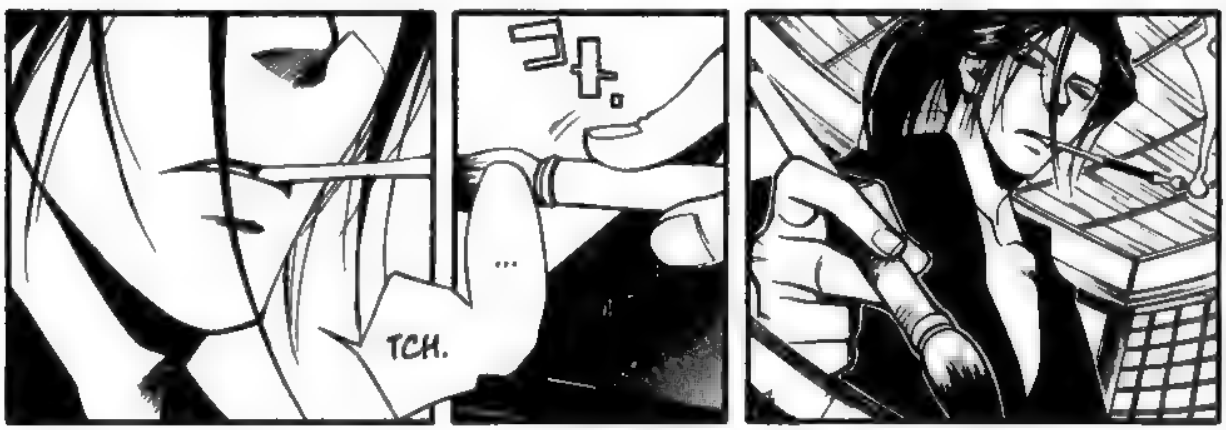
THE ANSWER IS MORE LIKE YEARS.
I WON'T ACCEPT IT! I WILL NOT STAND FOR THIS!!
YOU CAN'T ACT LIKE THIS, HEISUKE! BE A MAN, DAMN YOU!!
Gasp
WHAT THE...
thwap
...
I ALWAYS SUSPECTED YOU HAD A FOUL MOUTH.
...

YOU KNOW, YOU MAKE ME SICK, TOO.
WHAT ARE YOU SUPPOSED TO BE, MY GUARD?
HA HA! OF COURSE NOT.
Hee hee
...I NEVER TOLD YOU TO BE QUITE SO BRUSQUE.
WELL, YOU'VE REALLY GET THE HOUND TO BARKING NOW.
YOU REALIZE ...
I'VE COME TO ESCORT YOU.
ITOU-SENSEI IS ALREADY AT JOUAN TEMPLE.
AND NOW...
...YOU ARE OUR COMPATRIOT.

"COMPATRIOT"...
"FRIEND"...
"IT'S CLEAR THAT IT WAS NO ORDINARY SEPPUKU."



I DON'T CARE ANY LONGER.



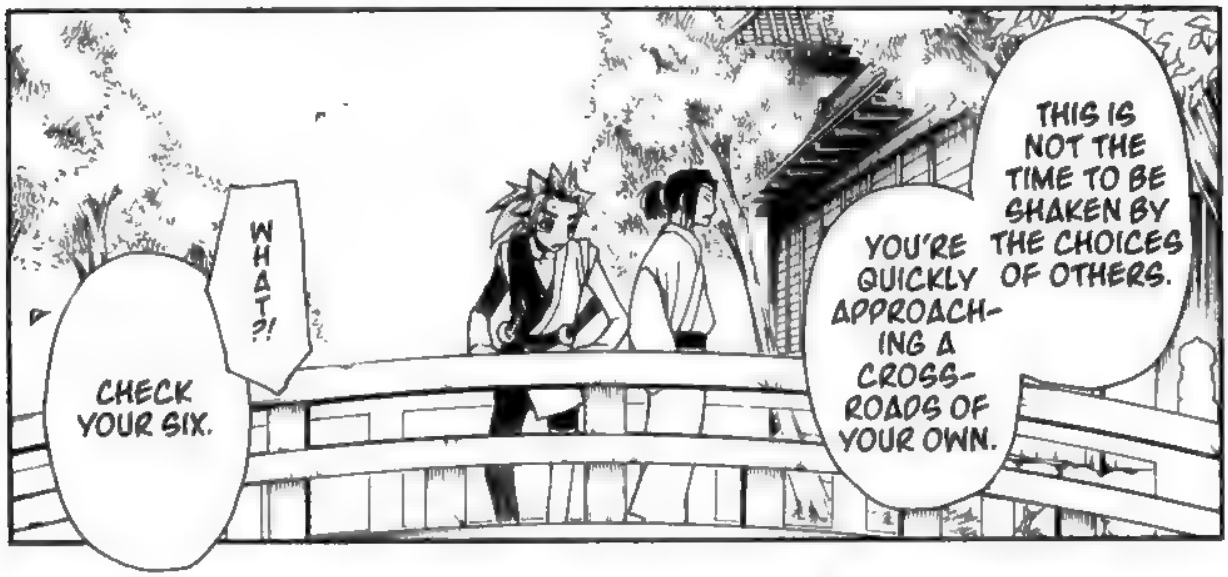
TOSS THIS OUT, ICHIMURA.
YES, SIR.
...?
NO SMART-ASS RES-PONSE? THAT'S KIND OF CREEPY.
...
EVEN I HAD MY SUSPICIONS THAT THIS MIGHT SOMEDAY COME TO PASS.
BUT...

MM...?
First Squad Captain-
Second Squad Captain-
Nagakura Shinpachi
Third Squad Captain-
Saitou Hajime
WHAT THE HELL DOES THIS MEAN?!
WHY WOULD YOU, COMPLETELY OUT OF THE BLUE...
...JUST SWITCH OVER TO JOIN THAT DAMN ITOU'S SIDE?!

...
WE ARE ALL FACED ...
...WITH A MOMENT OF CHOICE AT PRESENT.
CHOICE ...?
THAT'S RIGHT.
AN ACT THAT WILL DETERMINE YOUR POSITION IN THE SITUATION TO COME.
THE DESTINATIONS ARE ALL CLEAR.
BUT CHOICES MUST BE MADE.
YOU DETERMINE IN WHICH DIRECTION YOU GO.
YOU SAY THAT AS IF IT'S...
...YOUR FATE TO LEAVE THE GROUP...

LET ME GUESS: NOWHERE GOOD, RIGHT?
SO YOU'RE GETTING OUT WHILE THE GETTING'S GOOD. YOU KNOW YOUR "DESTINATION."
YOU KNOW WHERE THE SHINSENGUMI IS GOING.
I GUESS YOU CAN SEE WHAT'S AHEAD.
OH, HELL!
...
EVERYTHING'S SWELL FOR YOU. YOU AVOID TROUBLE AND HOLD NO REGRETS.
AND YET YOU REFUSE TO SPEAK ABOUT ANYTHING YOU KNOW.
Bah...
PER-SONAL GAIN ...?
I'D NEVER EVEN CONSI-DERED THAT.
HA HA.

...


WHAT?!
CHECK YOUR SIX.
YOU'RE QUICKLY APPROACHING A CROSSROADS OF YOUR OWN.
THIS IS NOT THE TIME TO BE SHAKEN BY THE CHOICES OF OTHERS.

IT'S... YOU!

...
THIS IS A VERY IMPORTANT DECISION.
CHOOSE WISELY.
YOU NEVER CHANGE, DO YA, SAITOU?
YOU SPOT THE GREAT RYOUMA IN BROAD DAYLIGHT, AND YOU'VE GOT NO INTENTION OF NABBIN' HIM!
HEY, MISTER!
...
HOW HAVE YOU BEEN? SAY...
...YOU'VE CHANGED SOMEHOW!

?!
WHAT?
Tug tug
I DON'T WANT US TO BE INTER-RUPTED.
LET'S FIND SOME-PLACE... SECLUDED.
HEY, MISTER!
OWW!
HEY! WHERE ARE YOU TAKING ME?!
...
ICHIMURA TETSUNO-SUKE.

THIS IS THE LAST TIME...
...I'M COMIN' TO SEE YA.
NAKAOKA AND I HAVE CONVINCED SAIGOU-SAN AND KATSURA-SAN TO JOIN FORCES IN THE SATCHOU ALLIANCE.
IN THE NEAR FUTURE, THE FORCES IN SUPPORT OF THE EMPEROR WILL STEP FORWARD TO THROW DOWN THE SHOGUNATE.
HUH? WH-WHY?! WHAT DID I--
I'M AN ENEMY OF THE SHIN-SENGUMI, Y'KNOW.
I'M SAKAMOTO RYOUMA, ENEMY OF THE SHOGUNATE. YOU MUST KNOW THAT.
...
REALLY?!
OF COURSE YOU KNEW THAT!

WAIT A MINUTE...
AND THE SAME FATE WILL BEFALL YOU ALL IN THE SHINSENGUMI.
I MEAN ...
EVEN IF IT'S TRUE...
EVEN LORD YAMAUCHI YOUDOU OF MY HOME IN TOSA HAS RAISED HIS HEAVY BROW.
IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME UNTIL THE SHOGUNATE IS OBLITERATED.
THE COMMANDER AND THE OTHER LEADERS WON'T ABANDON THE GROUP, JUST BECAUSE THEY KNOW THEY'RE GOING TO LOSE.
...I CAN'T JUST SAY, "I'M GOING TO QUIT THE GROUP SO THAT I DON'T DIE."
EVEN THEN, Y'STILL NEED TO COME WITH ME.

W-WITH YOU...?
YEP. QUIT THE SHINSENGUMI AND COME WITH ME.
YOU ICHIMURA BROTHERS ARE TOO IMPORTANT TO DIE FOR AN INCONSEQUENTIAL SHOGUNATE.

WHEN YOU DIE, IT SHOULD BE WITH THE COUNTRY ON YOUR BACK, SCREAMING AT THE WORLD.
EVEN IF NO ONE ELSE REALLY SEES THE WORLD...
...YOU OUGHTA DO IT.

WEREN'T YOU GONNA BE A "PEACEMAKER"?

PEACE ...
... MAKER ...

...TO 'RAG Y'ALL INTO THIS.
...I DON'T EVEN KNOW IF IT'S RIGHT...
TO BE HONEST ...
...
HOW D'YOU SUPPOSE ...
...RYUNO-SUKE FELT WHEN HE LEFT THAT TO YOU?
...TO DIE HERE.
BUT I DON'T WANT YA...
...
TELL ME MORE.

I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING.
ABOUT THIS COUNTRY, OR ABOUT "PEACE-MAKERS"...
...OR EVEN ABOUT MY DAD.
I CAN'T CHOOSE MY FUTURE UNLESS I UNDERSTAND MY PAST.
I JUST ...
... DON'T ...
...KNOW... ANYTHING!

HE MUST HAVE BEEN GREAT ...
THAT'S AMAZING ...
OH... SO MY DAD LIVED IN ANOTHER COUNTRY?
AND THE SHOGUNATE NEEDED HIS HELP?
HE NEEDS SOME KINDA FOUNDATION TO KEEP 'IM STEADY.
AND YOU'RE DRAGON BOY'S LAST LIVING FAMILY MEMBER.
WHEN YOU GO OUT TO SEE THE WORLD, YOU'RE TAKIN' ON WHOLE COUNTRIES.
PROB'LY WANTED YOU TO LIVE IN PEACE AN' TRANQUILITY.
BUT WHY DIDN'T TATSU-NII TELL ME ANY OF THIS?

A FOUN-DATION ...
WELL ...
...GIVE IT A GOOD PONDER.
JUST TELL ME ONE MORE THING.
I'LL BE WAITIN' FOR YA THERE.
IF YOU FEEL LIKE IT, COME TO THE OMIYA INN ON 3RD AVENUE.

...
WHAT DOES "PEACEMAKER" MEAN?
JUST WHAT IT SOUNDS LIKE.
ONE WHO CREATES PEACE.
ONE WHO CREATES PEACE?
BUT ITS TANGIBLE DEFINITION IS SOMETHIN' ELSE.
HE MIGHT...

...HAVE ALREADY EXPLAINED IT MORE ELOQUENTLY, THOUGH.
...
...IS WHAT I'LL TELL YA THE NEXT TIME WE MEET.
AND THAT REAL MEANING ...
A MAN ...
...WHO MAKES PEACE...

Peace Maker...!

HMMMM...
FURRURR...
SO, HE'S TRYING TO TAKE TETSUNO-SUKE WITH HIM, IS HE?
HMPH.
YOU'RE BECOMING A BIT OF A BOTHER...
...
SAKAMOTO RYOUMA.

Chapter 21
海
Sea
第弐拾一話

NOW THEN...
MROWWW...
WELL DONE. YOU DESERVE A REWARD, MY DEAR.
...
I JUST WANT "PARTNERS," YOU SEE.
WHAT DO YOU SAY? UNDERSTAND THAT I DON'T NEED TO ASK YOU FOR INFORMATION.
Hee hee
YOU ARE A MYSTERIOUS MAN.

COME... OVER HERE.
YOU MUST BE DREAD-FULLY BORED, YOU POOR THING.
I FEEL SORRY FOR YOU, YOU KNOW.

LET ME FILL YOU IN ON WHAT YOU'VE MISSED.

YOU MYSTIFY ME.
EVEN GIVEN YOUR HATRED OF THE MAN, WHY THE NEED TO GO SO FAR?

WHAT I WISH TO SEE IS YOU, YOURSELF.

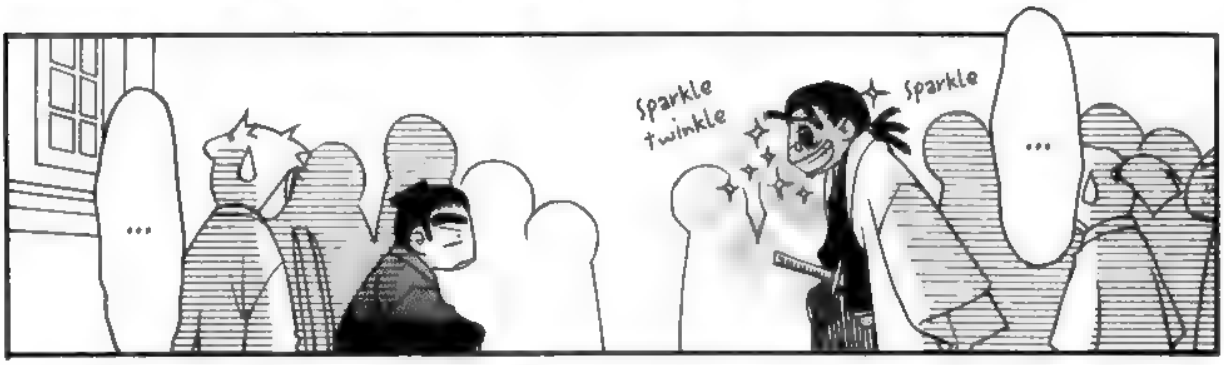
バチャ
MY REASONING IS QUITE SIMPLE.
"NEED"?
OH, THERE'S NO "NEED" AT ALL.
I'LL DO IT... BECAUSE I WANT TO SO BADLY THAT I CAN'T STAND IT.
HUFF!
HE'

I'M SORRY!!
I DIDN'T MEAN TO BE LATE!
huff
huff
WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN DOING ALL THIS TIME, UMANO-SUKE?!
HEY, WHERE'S THE CAPTAIN?!
IS HE HERE YET?!
I'M STARTING TO GET WORRIED.
WHAT IF HE WAS ATTACKED BY AN ASSASSIN ON THE STREET?
Ga ha hah
NEVER! HE'D BE THE LAST MAN TO FALL FOR THAT ONE!
Sigh...
AS ALWAYS, HE HAS YET TO ARRIVE.
I DON'T THINK YOU CAN PASS IT OFF SO BLITHELY ANYMORE.
EVERY MAN IN THE COUNTRY HAS HEARD THE NAME "SAKAMOTO RYOUMA" BY NOW.
HE CAN'T EVEN WALK ABOUT HIS HOMETOWN WITHOUT FEARING FOR HIS LIFE.
HEY, ALL US GUYS IN THE KAIENTAI WISH WE COULD GO WITH HIM!
Raahh! Captain!!
I bet you are!
HMPH.
ARE YOU STILL HOLDING A GRUDGE ABOUT THE FACT THAT YOU WEREN'T ALLOWED TO GO WITH HIM, SHIRAMINE-SAN?
Aaah-.

WE WON'T REALLY KNOW ONE WAY OR ANOTHER UNTIL SAKAMOTO-SENSEI RETURNS.
DUNNO. IT'S HARD TO SAY.
YOU DON'T REALLY THINK THE SHOGUNATE WILL AGREE TO RESTORE POWER TO THE THRONE, DO YOU?
...HMM?
YES. WE CAN ONLY HOPE THAT THEY TOOK THE BAIT...
...
HE WAS THE ONE PUSHING FOR LOTS OF BENEFITS FOR THE SHOGUNATE, RIGHT?
NAGA-OKA WAS INVOLVED IN THE PLANS TO RE-STORE THE EMPEROR TO POWER, TOO.
UH, I HAVE A SUSPI-CION...
WHAT IS IT, YONO-SUKE?
...THAT SAKAMOTO-SENSEI HAS RETURNED.

CAPTAIN!!
CAPTAIN, WE ARE GLAD TO SEE YOU WELL!
CAP-TAIN!
WE BEEN WAITIN', CAP'N!
CAP-TAIN!
CAPTAIN SAKA-MOTO!!
MUR MUR
MUR MUR

...
...
RYOUMA.
SHINTARO.
GULP
...


...
Sparkle twinkle
Sparkle
...

UH...
YES...?
Nod nod
YESSSS?
YESSSSSS!!

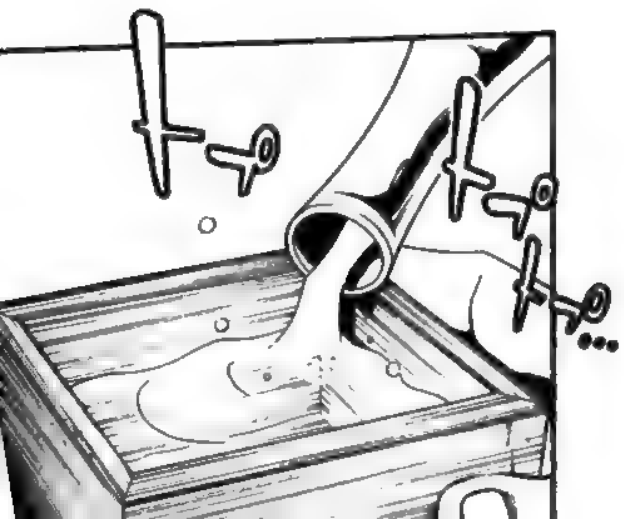
YEEEEEESSSS!!
WE DID IT!!
RESTOR-ATION OF THE IMPERIAL THRONE!!
Woooooo!!
IT'S OFFICIAL!!
YOU DID IT, CAPTAIN!!
HOORAY!
THAT'S OUR CAPTAIN!!
BANZAI!!
HOORAY!
"RESTORATION OF THE IMPERIAL THRONE"
THE RETURN OF NATIONAL CONTROL OF JAPAN FROM THE TOKUGAWA SHOGUNATE, WHICH HAD RULED FOR 250 YEARS SINCE THE DAYS OF TOKUGAWA IEYASU, TO THE EMPEROR.

HIP HIP HOORAY!
BAN-ZAI!!
R-a-a-a

KEN-KICHI!
WELL, AT LEAST HE REALIZES HE'S EC-CENTRIC...
AS YOU KNOW, MY NORMAL FASHION SENSE IS A LI'L TOO AHEAD OF THE TIMES!
AHH, THIS? THIS IS MY ANTI-DIGNITARY "BATTLE ARMOR," FRIENDS.
I MERELY PROVIDED A SMALL SERVICE TO THIS CAUSE...
ME? NEVER!
KATSU-SAN HIMSELF WAS SHOCKED AT YOUR INTELLECT!
NOW ALL OF YOUR EFFORTS HAVE BORNE FRUIT!
SHUNMA, YOU'VE ALWAYS BEEN TOO STUFFY FOR YOUR OWN GOOD.
Sighhh...
I CAN'T COUNT THE NUMBER OF TIMES I THOUGHT OF RUSHING TO KYOTO TO FIND YOU.
EVEN WE HEARD TALES OF YOUR RECKLESS EXPLOITS.
ABSO-LUTELY.
MORE IMPORTANT, I AM GLAD TO SEE YOU ALIVE AND WELL! WE WERE ALL WORRIED, CAPTAIN.

SARA!
I WANNA INTRODUCE YOU TO THE ENTIRE GANG! GIT OUT HERE, SARA!
...?!
PLUS, I'VE BEEN UTILIZING THE SER-VICES OF A BODYGUARD!
Please act responsibly, Captain...
Pull it together, Shunma!
Bwah ha ha ha ha!
...
I DIDN'T WANNA SIT AROUND WHILE YOU GOT ANOTHER ULCER WORRYIN' AND CRYIN' ABOUT ME.
I KNEW IT WAS THE RIGHT CHOICE T'GO BY MYSELF.

YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO MENTION THAT PART!
A CHICK!
A BEAUTI-FUL BODY-GUARD!
A GIRL?!
SHE'S GOT A STREAK O' THE MULE IN HER, BUT SHE'S A FINE LOOKIN' WOMAN, NO DOUBT!
I HIRED A NINJA I SCOUTED IN KYOTO T'BE MY BODY-GUARD!


...

SORRY GUYS. SHE'S AWFUL SHY!
WHAT IS IT WITH GROUPS OF MEN?
Ha ha ha!
Hot-chick! Hot-chick! Hot-chick!

IT'S THE SAKE YOU DRINK BEFORE YOU TAKE THE FIELD OF BATTLE.
NOW LISTEN TO ME. THIS AIN'T CELE-BRATION SAKE.

UP-HEAVAL ?
HE MEANS REVO-LUTION.
WE CANNOT ASSUME THAT THE UPHEAVAL WILL COME WITHOUT SIGNIFICANT CASUALTIES ON OUR SIDE.
EVEN WEAKENED, HE IS THE GREATEST FOE ONE COULD FACE IN JAPAN.
SATCHOU AND THE EM-PEROR MAY BE ALIGNED, BUT WE FACE TOKUGAWA AND HIS FOUR MILLION BUSHELS OF RICE.

...A VISION TO GROW INTO A LIVING FUTURE!!
IT WILL RE-MAIN...
EVEN IF OUR NUMBERS SHOULD FALL TO ONE SOLITARY MAN, AS LONG AS HE ENVISIONS IT...
REMEMBER THE HARD TIMES, AND THEN PICTURE...
...THE BRILLIANT DAWN OF JAPAN TO COME!

IT IS A WORLD THAT PUTS FREEDOM BEFORE CLASS, WHERE PEASANTS AND SAMURAI ARE TREATED EQUALLY.
WE IN THE KAIENTAI WILL SAIL OUT INTO THE SEAS OF THE WIDE WORLD, SEARCHING FOR THE PRINCIPLES OF THIS NEW JAPAN!!
THIS SMALL ISLAND NATION IS TOO SMALL FOR US!
WE WILL GO TO AMERICA, ENGLAND AND HOLLAND, THE "FREE COUNTRIES"...
...IN SEARCH OF THIS THING CALLED "DEMO-CRACY"...
...AND FIND A NEW PLACE FOR OUR PEOPLE WITHIN THIS WORLD!!

...IT WAS A SHAME TO KEEP THEM HIDDEN LIKE THAT.
I'VE ALWAYS THOUGHT...
...BUT YOU GOT SOME GORGEOUS BLUE EYES, LADY!!
WELL, I'LL BE DAMNED...
CAP'N!
CAP-TAIN!!
TAKE US TO THE DAWN OF JAPAN!!
THAT'S RIGHT! SHOW ME THE WAY, CAPTAIN!!
Raaaaahhh!
CAP-TAIN!
WE DON'T FEAR NO BATTLES WITH YOU AT THE HEAD, CAPTAIN!!
TO A FREE COUNTRY!!
TO JAPAN ON THE WORLD STAGE!!
THAT'S IT!!

TO A NEW JAPAN!!!

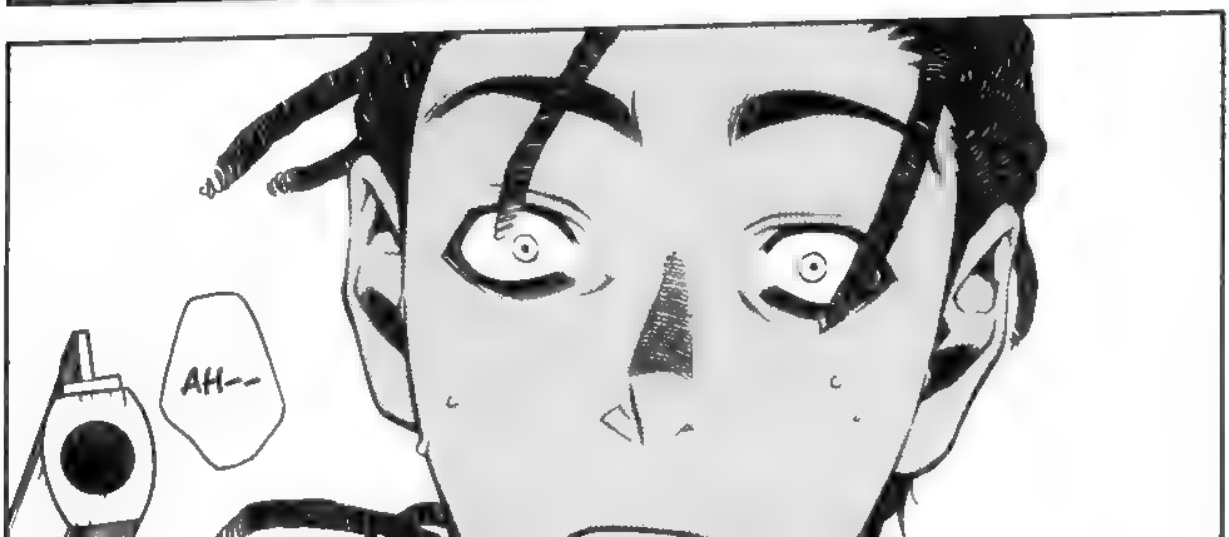
KYOTO, NOVEMBER 1867

BAH! IT'S PATHETIC!
THE VERY FIGURE AT THE HEAD OF THE REVOL-UTION...
BWUHH...
BWACHOO!
パチ
パチ

BCHOO!!
SICK.
...BROUGHT LOW BY A MERE WINTER CHILL! SIMPLY PATHETIC.
Sigh...
HEY! I'M A DELICATE SOUL, FRIEND!
Mutter
SEEING ALL THOSE FAMILIAR FACES MAKES A MAN A BIT CARELESS, IS ALL...
FINE, FINE, WHATEVER YOU SAY.
I'M SURE WE CAN OVERLOOK THIS TRANSGRESSION ON YOUR BIRTHDAY!
ばふっ
SO WHY'S HE YELLIN' AT ME THEN?
PLUS, YOU'VE BEEN WORKING YOUR ASS OFF FOR THE LAST FEW YEARS!
I'D SAY YOU'VE EARNED A BREAK. LEAVE THE REST UP TO KATSU-SAN AND THE HIGHER-UPS!
Snuff...
MMM...
SARA! ROLL OUT A BED AND GET RYOUMA UNDER THE COVERS!
HRMPH.
I TOLD YOU! I'M NOT YOUR MAID!
tok
tok
THE INN-KEEPER IS PREPARING A FUTON FOR HIM.

WAITING? WHO COULD IT BE?
AH, IT'S NO ONE I'VE TOLD YOU OF YET.
Sniff
IT AIN'T A BAD IDEA...
...BUT I'M WAITIN' HERE FOR SOMEONE.
RYOUMA! MIND TAKING A TRIP BACK TO TOSA ONCE YOU'RE FULLY RECOVERED?
Shinsen--?
W-WHY DO YOU FIND PEOPLE FROM THE MOST DANGEROUS PLACES?!
THEY'RE BROTHERS WITHIN THE SHINSEN-GUMI.
PARTICULARLY THE YOUNGER ONE, WITH SPIKY RED HAIR THAT STANDS UP STRAIGHT!
SPIKY RED HAIR?
HE DOESN'T MEAN ICHIMURA TETSU-NOS--
ゴト

WHAT WAS THAT SOUND, SARA?
?
...
RYO...


AH--

AH...
UHH?
PLIP PLIP

AHH...
AAAAH!
AAAAAAAA!!
AAAAAHH!!

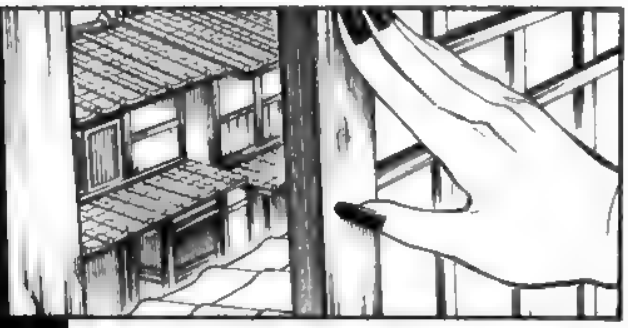
AAAAAAHHHHH!!
AAAAAAA!
YOU FILTHY BAS-TARDS!!!
DO IT.
...
YOU'LL GO TO HELL FOR THIS...
HOW DARE YOU...
HOW *DARE* YOU SNUFF OUT OUR LIGHT OF HOPE!!

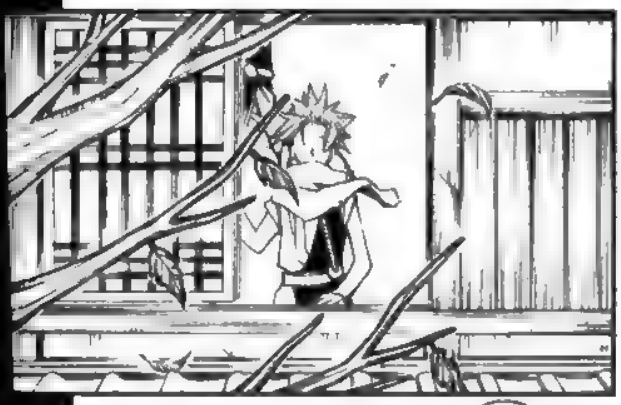
AAAHH!
GWAAH!
TAKE THAT!
...
RYOU ...
...MA...
...!!
WELL, WELL, WELL!
RRGH!
I WONDERED WHO THE FOREIGN BITCH MIGHT HAVE BEEN.
KITA... MURA...

MUST BE THAT FILTHY, IMPURE BLOOD OF YOURS.
...
I'LL KILL... YOU...
YOU REALLY KNOW HOW TO PICK 'EM, DON'T YOU? SEEING THE LOVE OF YOUR LIFE KILLED YET AGAIN?
Heh heh
I'M START-ING TO WONDER...
...IF YOUR AFFECTION MIGHT NOT BE A DEADLY WEAPON!
HRGK!
I'LL LET YOU LIVE... FOR NOW.
JUST DON'T GET IN OUR WAY.

GBFFNA!!
GUHH...
UNG
DON'T FINISH HIM OFF YET.
WE DON'T WANT HIM DEAD TOO SOON.
WHAT
WHAP
TWITCH
TWIK
WHAP
HOW ABOUT THAT?
TWITCH
HE'S STILL TRYING TO LIVE.

...FOR TRYING TO TAKE TETSU AWAY.
THIS IS YOUR FAULT...
YOU BROUGHT THIS UPON YOURSELF.
...
YOU CAN'T GO TAKING HIM ACROSS THE SEA.
YOU CAN'T GO TAKING HIM OUT OF MY SIGHT.

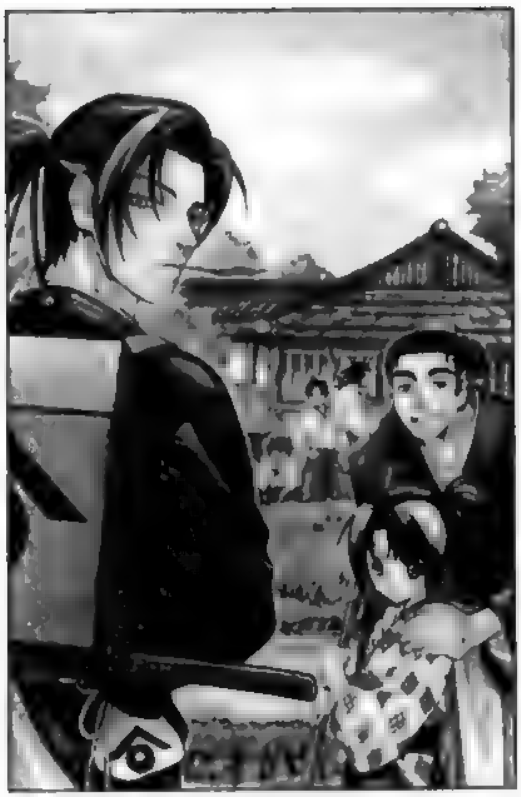




AND THEY'LL NEED A TARGET UPON WHICH TO UNLEASH THEIR ANGER...

...WON'T THEY, TETSU?

Peace Maker Kurogane 4 End



I know, Okita-tan! This one was all about Mister Wristwinkme!
Believe it or not, Chrono did draw this strip!
We had to pop in here, because this story about the Shinsengumi had no Shinsengumi this volume!
Pretty Mister 2nd Grown-Up Baby
Aaaah
Ooooh
It's the sort of manga that gives off a rotting smell when you pull up the floorboards!
Have you noticed that every volume of this manga ends with someone dying? How depressing!
What a wimp Isei is! Right, Okita-tan?
I think even death-obsessed Chrono-tan is starting to get burned out about it!
BOOM!!
Bean jam!
Plum
Katsura Kogoro looks like he belongs in a pet shop, not a revolution!
Look how little respect the figures of this period are given!!
Tsuu
Chrono shivers
Yes, pretty mister.
What does that mean?!
Also, is there any meaning to the manga?
"Pretty Mister"?!
Well, we are talking about "someone with receding hairline" and "pretty mister" fetishes. She's just a weirdo perv.
A Pretty Mister is a pure, innocent childish man who cries often. Also refers to a person with adorable ever. Pretty?!
Get back, Tetsu!!!
It's too dangerous!
Act your age!
Come on, Captain!
I tried a little experiment. Turn your side down!

And here we are in 2004. It's too fast! I'm knocking on the door of 30! I've finally found my "ideal self" at this age, but the number of things I need to fix and the speed that time flows are making me dizzy. Still, it keeps me focused on my goals. And after all, it's all about the process of continuing to strive, not whether you reach that goal or not! (I'm getting confused, because this is so different from my usual self.)

About my new work office, I've finally bought some curtains (too late). I'm slowly, slowly getting everything right. I want to make it a very stylish and dandy office, but it looks like I'm failing. My tastes are so varied, none of it meshes with anything else! In fact, it's so embarrassing, I don't know when I'll be able to show it to you! This is pathetic!! Well, see you next volume!!

Well, it was another long wait for Volume 4. Oh my god, it's been over half a year since Volume 3! Sorry about that... Anyways, this tome you hold featured a very globetrotting, international Ryouma-san. Not only that, but I got to draw some well-known warriors of the shogunate outside of the Shinsengumi, and I can barely stand to look at them because my character designs are so outrageously fake! As I drew them, I was chanting, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry!" under my breath, hoping that all the history buffs reading along can forgive me for such slanderous treatment... But y'know, you've got to have that goofy character humor to make things easier for those readers who aren't familiar with historical facts. In fact, if I hadn't had to learn about them to draw this manga, there are plenty of events from this period that I never would have understood-- if I took a history test now, I might actually get a decent score! So it was a tough volume to produce, but I feel like I gained something out of it. Of course, my amateurish qualities are still on full display, too... Sigh.

Bow-wow!
Let's at least finish this one with a nice happy illustration!!
Thank you and goodbye, Ryouma-tan. It was more fun than you could imagine drawing the Kaientai members' chit-chatting. If only I had more time with them!! Alas...

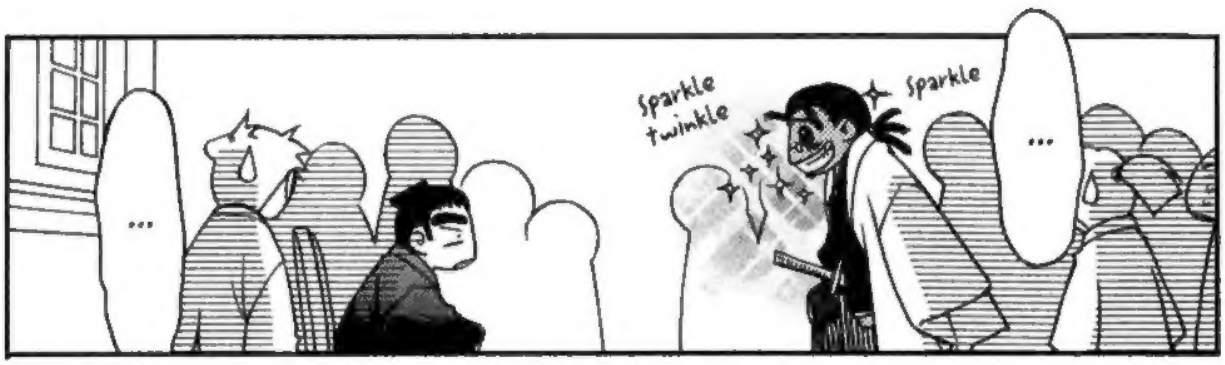
PEACE MAKER.
KUROGANE. 4.
NANAE CHRONO.

•

MINAGO·H
YUHCO·M
YUHCO·F
NOZOMI·T

•

MAKOTO·H


...
sparkle
twinkle
sparkle
...